The New Criterion

April 2000

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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Notes & Comments: April 2000

Science & human nature

We are often negligent, we admit, about keeping up with *Wired*, the popular monthly magazine about high technology that describes itself as "the journal of record for the future." But a news report about a long essay in the April 2000 issue caught our attention. Titled "Why the Future Doesn't Need Us," the twelve-thousand-word essay dilates on the dangers inherent in certain impending technological advances. Nothing surprising about that, you might say: crackpots have been warning about the dangers of technology at least since 1750 when Rousseau argued that "our minds have been corrupted in proportion as the arts and sciences have improved."

What makes "Why the Future Doesn't Need Us" newsworthy—as of this writing, *The New York Times* has already published three articles about the essay—is its provenance. It was written not by a disgruntled philosopher but by a working scientist. The author is Bill Joy, co-founder and chief scientist of Sun Microsystems, one of the companies whose technology (notwithstanding Al Gore's claims to paternity) made the Internet's World Wide Web possible. As Mr. Joy insists, he is hardly a Luddite. On the contrary, as his own work at Sun has demonstrated, he has always had "a strong belief in the value of the scientific search for truth and in the ability of great engineering to bring material progress." Like most people, Mr. Joy gratefully acknowledges that scientific and technical advances have "immeasurably improved everyone's life over the last couple hundred years."

Nevertheless, Mr. Joy is worried. Recent breakthroughs in certain realms of scientific inquiry, he believes, pose unprecedented threats to humanity. He mentions in particular advances in genetic engineering, robotics, and what has come to be called "nanotechnology"—the effort to re-engineer the world at the most basic level, atom by atom, molecule by molecule. "The idea is," one recent report on the subject explains,

> that if humans could tell atoms how to arrange themselves and how to behave, many of the properties of a material could be controlled at will. Just as nature turns the carbon atoms of coal into diamond by changing their arrangement, so can properties such as color, strength and brittleness be determined at the atomic level.
>
> Scientists believe that if they could learn how to make a brick atom by atom, its molecules could also be "instructed" to self-repair when a crack appeared, or to react to humidity in the air by becoming less or more porous.

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In the last two hundred years, science has produced so many benisons that it is tempting simply to get on the wagon of change and equate the advance of technology with material progress. Notwithstanding some fearsome by-products—nuclear weapons, for example—the record thus far largely supports that equation. The problem is, Mr. Joy warns, that "the most compelling 21st-century technologies—robotics, genetic engineering, and nanotechnology—pose a different threat [from] the technologies that have come before." It is not just that such technologies promise to grant mankind unprecedented power to intervene in the processes of nature: they also possess a novel and alarming potential for self-replication. Consequently, if the potential for constructive intervention by means of these new technologies is tremendous, so is the potential for destructive intervention, accidental as well as malicious. Mr. Joy cites the scientist Eric Drexler (coiner of the term "nanotechnology"), who imagined a number of catastrophic scenarios:

> "Plants" with "leaves" no more efficient than today's solar cells could out-compete real plants, crowding the biosphere with an inedible foliage. Tough omnivorous "bacteria" could out-compete real bacteria: They could spread like blowing pollen, replicate swiftly, and reduce the biosphere to dust in a matter of days. Dangerous replicators could easily be too tough, small, and rapidly spreading to stop—at least if we make no preparation.

Furthermore, because harnessing many of these technologies—unlike nuclear technology—will require neither huge engineering facilities nor rare and dangerous materials, they are likely to be within the reach of small organizations or individuals. Mr. Joy concludes that "we are on the cusp of the further perfection of extreme evil, an evil whose possibility spreads well beyond that which weapons of mass destruction bequeathed to the nation-states, on to a surprising and terrible empowerment of extreme individuals."

We believe that much of what Mr. Joy has to say is alarmist. Much else—his appeals to the Dalai Lama and Henry David Thoreau, for example—strikes us as naïve and utopian. And yet, and yet . . . How minatory are the developments that Mr. Joy discusses? Are they more than the familiar gloomy prognostications that fill the pages of science fiction? As to the technical particulars, we, like other laymen, cannot pretend to know. The real issue, we think, concerns not any particular technological advance, but rather the attitude toward the world and toward humanity that our staggering technological success to date has fostered. It is an attitude of hubris, epitomized long ago by Descartes's famous promise that, following his scientific method, man would make himself the "master and possessor of nature." At last we seem to be on the threshold of really fulfilling that promise. But the admonitions voiced by Mr. Joy and others suggest that such mastery may come at an unacceptably steep price. What, after all, would it profit a man to gain mastery over the world that his ingenuity had rendered humanly uninhabitable?

We agree with P. G. Wodehouse's Jeeves that in many respects Nietzsche was "fundamentally unsound." Yet Nietzsche did see with startling clarity that science unguided by human values bred nihilism. "Science," he wrote in an early fragment, "probes the processes of nature, but it can never *command* men. Science knows nothing of taste, love, pleasure, displeasure, exaltation, or exhaustion. Man must in some way *interpret*, and thereby evaluate, what he lives through and experiences." The task, then, is to formulate values that can guide—and ultimately circumscribe—scientific inquiry and technological development. "Science," Nietzsche continues, "is totally dependent upon philosophical opinions for all of its goals and methods, though it easily forgets this. But that philosophy which gains control also has to consider the problem of the level to which science should be permitted

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to develop: it has to determine *value*." That this is easier said than done does not mean it is any less imperative.

Mr. Joy may exaggerate the particular threats that await humanity. Indeed, we suspect that the real threat may arise not from the instruments of power we forge but from the spiritual capitulations we accede to in wielding those instruments. For a culture weaned on technological triumph, one of the most difficult truths to acknowledge is that not every problem can be understood according to the calculus of scientific rationality. Nature is not simply a passive medium awaiting reconstruction according to our ingenuity. It is also an active collaborator in defining our humanity. To acknowledge that is to acknowledge that our humanity, like our power, will always have limits, and that we transgress those limits only at the expense of our humanity.

Dull, tedious, boring

Now we know why the Whitney Museum of American Art commissioned Hans Haacke to create a work of art for its 2000 Biennial exhibition: sheer desperation. They must have hoped that Mr. Haacke, who specializes in delivering left-wing political sermons dressed up as art, would inject a few red corpuscles into an exhibition that turns out to be notable only for its unrelieved tedium. In the recent past, the Whitney Biennial has been repellent. It has been silly. It has been full of ugly, pathological, pointless objects. But has it ever been quite so uniformly dull?

It was a good thing that the Whitney Museum leaked details of *Sanitation*, the work they commissioned from Mr. Haacke, before the Biennial actually opened. That at least generated some controversy. Otherwise we doubt that anyone would have paid much attention to it. Yes, it is certainly outrageous that Mr. Haacke should compare Mayor Giuliani and other public figures to Nazis; but once you have said that, you have said everything. Like all of Mr. Haacke's work, *Sanitation* has no independent existence as a work of art. It exists only in its message: it is political propaganda pure and simple. Indeed, it was far more interesting in its description than in its reality. When we read about garbage cans and loudspeakers reproducing the sound of marching soldiers and some statements about art from Mayor Giuliani printed in Gothic script we were free to imagine some sort of melodramatic mise-en-scène. At the press view for the Biennial, people were crowded around the room that contained Mr Haacke's opus: but the quizzical look on everyone's face spoke volumes: "Is this what all the fuss was about?"

This season's Whitney Biennial does raise some important questions, but they are not *aesthetic* questions. Rather they are questions of what we might call cultural politics, questions such as: What role does the Whitney Museum play in cultural life today? Why is it that virtually every object on view in the new Biennial is a tired art-world cliché? Why is it that six curators scouring this great country for the most interesting art produced in the last two years came up with an assemblage that could be stuffed into the garbage cans thoughtfully provided by Mr. Haacke without subtracting one iota from the sum total of genuine artistic achievement? The answers to these questions form a melancholy commentary not only on the Whitney Biennial but also on established "art world" culture. Words like "challenging" and "destabilizing" occur with monotonous regularity in the wall labels accompanying the works in the Biennial. (One work even claims to "destabilize our 'natural' view of rain.") In fact the only thing that this exhibition "challenges" is the credulity of a public that, we suspect, is rapidly tiring of having its intelligence insulted.

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The American view of landscape

by Michael J. Lewis

I become a transparent eye-ball. I am nothing. I see all. The currents of the Universal being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God.
—Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature"

Weapon shapely, naked, wan,
Head from the mother's bowels drawn
Wood flesh and metal bone,
Limb only one and lip only one.
—Walt Whitman, "Broad-Axe Poem"

New York's Central Park and the suburban highway strip are as unlike as any two things can be, and yet both are quintessentially American. They are American in the same way that Versailles is French; they seem to express something fundamental and primal about the culture that produced them, and to express it in a way that literature or the pictorial arts cannot. But what precisely do they express about America, other than a loud and discordant bundle of contradictions?

Central Park is the work of a society with a reverence for land in its untamed and natural state that verges on the religious. Its design was selected in an 1858 competition that awarded the commission to Calvert Vaux and Frederick Law Olmsted, a firm which stressed the moral as well as aesthetic function of the park. They wanted to represent "the sensation of freedom itself" physically in their design. Vaux and Olmsted alone solved the competition's Gordian Knot—the requirement that four major roads transect the park—by ingeniously sinking the road beds beneath the surface to preserve the park's spatial continuity. In their Central Park, picturesque planning was overlaid with transcendentalist themes to produce something near the landscape equivalent of philosophy.

But if Central Park is widely considered America's finest man-made object, the modern highway strip is widely regarded as America's disgrace. Visually incoherent, hostile to urbanism in general and to pedestrians in particular—and hence inherently antisocial—it seems to embody most of what has gone wrong with America. Not even its champions, such as the pop architect Robert Venturi, deny its essential ugliness, but rationalize it as an expression of commercial vitality, poured out in signs, parking lots, and canopied drive-thrus. No one disputes that it has become a cardinal feature of the American landscape.

These two artifacts, which appear the products of mutually exclusive and mutually incomprehensible civilizations, seem to share nothing other than a similarly confident and swaggering approach to the treatment of the land. And in this respect, they are like so much of American culture. For no Western society has had so much land to use or squander, or has been so reflective and self-conscious about its relationship to it. From Hudson River School painting to transcendentalism, from Andrew Jackson

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Downing to Frank Lloyd Wright, land and landscape have been the great theme of American culture, both its subject matter and its raw material. They have given us some of our finest cultural achievements, and some of our worst.

The park and the highway strip can be thought of as the twin poles of the American attitude to the landscape. In the first instance land is understood as a coherent organism, whose aesthetic properties are inseparable from its spiritual, in the second, as a physical commodity, to be used without reference to what came before, or to what stands nearby; in the one, land is landscape, in the other, real estate. In fact, these different conceptions of the land have much more in common than seems possible. At heart both express something that might be called the American view of landscape, which came into being during the 1820s and 1830s, and whose constituent strands reach unbroken into the present, although they have been woven into something virtually unrecognizable.

The American idea of landscape is presented in its elemental form in the perennially popular works of the Hudson River School. These are the paintings of Thomas Cole (1801–1848) and his followers (Church, Cropsey, and Inness, among others), which formed the principal genre of American art between the Jacksonian Age and the Civil War. Working chiefly, but not exclusively, from the scenery of the Catskills and Adirondacks, they perfected a formulaic composition: a spacious view of wild and irregular mountain scenery in the distance, often dominated by a gorge and a waterfall, and an anecdote of meticulously drafted trees in the foreground. A glow of sunlight unmistakably hints at the presence of God, while in the margins is some evidence of man, in the form of a brooding spectator, a tree stump, or a curl of smoke from a distant cabin. And leaning against a tree might be a resting broadaxe, that ominous harbinger of settlement. The scope for artistic originality was quite restricted, confined to the rearrangement of these elements and the particular treatment of light and air. These painters seem to have been straining collectively to recreate some sort of lost original.

Cole achieved national fame in 1826, the same year that James Fenimore Cooper published *The Last of the Mohicans*. Both Cole and Cooper confronted the American landscape at its most sensitive place, the passage of the Hudson River between the Catskills and the Adirondacks. Here was some of the most spectacular natural scenery in America, and also some of its most ferocious industrialization. Already the Erie Canal was transforming the Hudson from a picturesque river running between old Dutch settlements to a mighty commercial conduit, reaching to the Great Lakes and beyond to the Mississippi. This was the climax of America's rush for internal improvements, the system of inland waterways which in a few years would give way to the railroad. Already the wilderness that Cole admired was shorn and clipped, and his hikes into the Catskills were made from sprawling wooden hotels.

Much Hudson River School work now seems plodding, especially because of the fastidious and often unpainterly draftsmanship that itemized nature with an encyclopedic comprehensiveness that satisfied the peculiar American appetite for inventories of facts. But these painters triumphed over what Poe called "mere Flemish devotion to matter of fact" by enlisting facts in the service of a moral vision, something that earlier American painters had failed to do. It is generally assumed that the chronic shortcoming of American art lay in education. But the generation of painters immediately preceding the Hudson River School—that of Vanderlyn, Trumbull, and Alston—was superbly trained, not to French levels perhaps, but certainly to British.

Nonetheless they never struck a deep chord within the American public, a failure not so much of education as of patronage. Their grand-manner painting was an exquisite art for art's sake, set before a country

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whose utilitarian strand looked with indifference, and whose puritan strand with suspicion, on high art. Their very lack of sophistication, however, made the Hudson River School painters broadly accessible and reassuringly moral. Scarcely a canvas was painted that could not be read as an allegory of Christian redemption, expressed in foliage that passes through every state of life from blossom and maturity to death, decay, and rebirth. Even the lone foreground figure, contemplating nature with his back toward us, suggests introspection of a spiritual sort. Although the convention of the solitary observer is a mainstay of European romanticism, here he is clearly an American Protestant, more likely to have in his pocket a copy of Emerson than of Rousseau (and is perhaps even there to inspect his investments). At last here was a public art that could be embraced by Protestant ministers. Surely the popularity of the genre has to do with its utter familiarity, and unvarying emotional tone, a mixture of sentimentality and pleasant melancholy. While Hudson River School paintings mourn the vanishing landscape, the emotional intensity seldom rises above a general wistfulness and never approaches despair, or even anger. If it is protest art, it is the mildest of protests.

As a consequence, Hudson River School paintings offered little challenge to those in the vanguard of clearing the land; rather than prompting guilt, they seemed somehow to alleviate it—or, in some instances, to serve as a trophy scalp. One of the most astonishing is the painting that the Lackawanna Railroad commissioned by Jasper Cropsey in 1855. In it a locomotive emerges head first from a new roundhouse in Scranton to drive across mildly rolling fields. Only on a second glance do the "crops" in the fields reveal themselves to be so many hundreds of tree stumps. The prediction of the broadaxe has come to pass, as decisively as a biblical judgment, and is looked upon in the sunny terms of Rotarian optimism.

Out of such paintings something like a coherent American view of nature might be gleaned. According to its tenets, nature reveals its essence in its primal and untamed state where it is both a manifestation of divinity and an instrument of personal transformation. Likewise nature is engaged in an epic and predestined confrontation with civilization, which would end with its complete subjugation. It will be seen that the first bundle of ideas can contradict the second, but this did not in the least diminish the popularity of the school. Out of this doctrine, at once both bursting with vitality and fundamentally inconsistent, emerged the great landscape architecture and town planning of the nineteenth century that compose one of the central achievements of American culture.

If the Hudson River School was wracked by contradiction, these contradictions had a distinguished pedigree. Long before Americans enjoyed the luxury or necessity of debating the higher meaning of nature, England was polarized between those whose conception of land was economic and those whose conception was aesthetic and political. This is the subject of Nigel Everett's splendid book *The Tory View of Landscape* (1994), which examines the English attitude toward nature at a time when the enclosure movement was remaking the countryside just as decisively and irrevocably as the Industrial Revolution was remaking the city. As Everett shows, the ensuing cultural turbulence came to shake not only those peasants and factory workers directly implicated, but even the whole structure of English society, and American as well.

At the heart of the enclosure movement was that seductively simple notion that land might be used more efficiently if assembled into large and continuous parcels. In the abstract, this was inarguable, and throughout the second half of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth enclosure lumbered along, as deliberately as a glacier, as one field after another was adjudicated in a separate parliamentary act. During little more than half a century, from

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1760 to 1815, seven million acres were forcibly cleared, drained, and enclosed. Besides common pastures and forests, medieval parish churches and entire villages were eradicated as well. To its foes, this was the wanton mutilation of the historical fabric of England.

Everett shows that opposition was no mere aesthetic or sentimental fad. Enclosure was not so much a change of scenery, but of society, for it swept away the whole fabric of local privileges and customary laws that was England's feudal heritage. Its opponents included the philosopher Edmund Burke who spoke for the organic continuity of English society. In the swift reshaping of physical and social structures, Burke perceived something as peremptory and dangerous as the French Revolution.

Since the Reformation and the dissolution of the monasteries, changes in land ownership presaged fundamental changes in the social order in England. And since the time of Cromwell, when many a cavalier forcibly confined to his estate took refuge in antiquarianism, England's historical landscape had come to be cherished almost as a living entity. But cultural nostalgia, as is so often the case, went hand in hand with violent modernization, and the Tory opponents of enclosure's collective outpouring of distress forms one of the apogees of English culture. The battle coincided with high romanticism, which championed all things irregular, picturesque, and quaint, and which gave to the Tory cause a permanent artistic monument. While landscape theorists such as Uvedale Price made the aesthetic case for a natural picturesque landscape, John Constable made the pictorial, and Jane Austen the literary.

Ranged against the Tory position was something that might be called the Whig view of landscape, were it an intellectual movement, which it was not. Rather, it was simply the accelerating trend in the industrializing world to treat land everywhere as a commodity and to view it independently of its customary usage. If it had any philosophical program at all, it was the chilly utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham, and the twin pillars of property rights and laissez-faire capitalism. Other than the highly mannered landscaping of its estates, it produced no great art. While the Tory view was celebrated by poets and painters, the real troubadours of the Whig landscape were canal speculators, scientific farmers, and lawyers.

This is not to say that Whigs were indifferent to the beauties of nature. In fact, the most enthusiastic supporters of the picturesque were Whig gentlemen, for whom the "improvement" of the country estate was a mark of fashion and good taste. Their inexhaustible patronage created the most prolific landscape gardener in English history, Lancelot "Capability" Brown (1716–1783), author of at least two hundred estates. Brown was legendary for riding through the grounds of an estate in an hour, making his plans, and then staking out his "improvements" the following morning, scattering clumps of trees and "serpentized" rivers as far as the horizon. Never was the irregularity of nature more studied or more artificial.

A Brown landscape was a polite and genteel thing—as choreographed as a minuet—in which privacy was carefully enforced and the whole vulgar business of agriculture masked and hidden. No contact with real rustics tainted the enjoyment of Brown's pastoral nature. Rather than untamed nature, these park-like estates suggested dominion and control, a subordination of landscape to the manor house as absolute as in any baroque garden. The Tory critique of Brown's landscapes focused on its ultimate frivolity, that it represented nothing more than the arbitrary tormenting of the land into pretty vistas.

The most important legacy of the Tory critique of landscape, although it falls outside the compass of Everett's book, was the Gothic Revival. In its response to enclosure and the Industrial Revolution, it went far beyond aesthetics to address the dislocations in their most spacious scope, from the

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relationship of society to the physical world, to the nature of work itself. No images of the changing English landscape are more haunting than those which August Welby Pugin, the unruly Gothic prodigy, published in his *Contrasts* (1836) where he juxtaposed vignettes of modern life with their medieval equivalents. In one he confronted an English town of 1440 with its counterpart of 1840, a lively landscape of parish steeples and picturesque almonries on the one hand, and, on the other, a joyless tableau of smokestacks, sewage, and workhouses. Here in one image is an expression of what Ruskin needed five volumes to say. In graphic terms, it is as violent an indictment of the modern world as anything penned by Karl Marx—who shared Pugin's appreciation for the collective and cooperative aspects of medieval life. Pugin's doctrine, and that of the entire Gothic Revival, was that a picturesque and organic physical environment is the natural expression of a humane way of life. Such was the central insight of the Tory critique of landscape.

Across the Atlantic, America's landscape painting and poetry found much of its source matter and formal vocabulary in English romanticism. And yet for all the dabbling in Tory imagery, the social underpinnings of this view of landscape were absolutely lacking in America. Changes to the landscape could upset no social order for the social order itself was based on the clearing and settling of the land, enclosure in its purest form. In fact, English enclosure was clearly spurred on by the profitable lessons of the colonial experience, first in Ireland and then in the Americas. Here were none of the props on which the Tory view rested—class structure, hereditary ownership of the land, and political nostalgia. On the contrary, the American attitude toward the landscape was thoroughly, instinctively, Whiggish. All factions took for granted the uninterrupted progression of highways and canals, all the innovations then subsumed in the category of "internal improvements."

Historically this indifference has been expressed in America's well-known predilection for organizing land wherever possible on a grid to an extent not seen since Roman antiquity. Gridiron planning was the ancient device for rendering a colony into equable parcels, but in America the process was taken to its Cartesian extreme. In 1811, the notorious Commissioners' Plan of New York City was unveiled, laying out a street plan for the still undeveloped part of the city, reaching from 23rd to 155th Street. The plan was stamped by stupendous foresight, and also by a stupefying lack of imagination as an unvarying and mechanical grid was unrolled across Manhattan as if it were a bolt of fabric, taking no heed of topographic features and leaving only a few slivers of public space.

The tendency to view the spatial order of the city as an infinitely extendable set of coordinates was a trait absolutely alien to European urbanism. There the contours of cities were fixed since time out of mind by the stone cinctures of medieval or baroque fortifications, which enforced density and established a strict spatial hierarchy that persisted long after the fortifications were dismantled. But the ability to project the city into the country, so destructive in our century, was inherent in America, where cities had never been enclosed. Even the Commissioners' Plan was not the most relentless example of mechanical gridding. In 1785 the Continental Congress passed a land ordinance that mandated the surveying of the western territories, which were plotted on a checkerboard of six miles square; eventually this checkerboard was extended across the continent. As any cross-country flight shows, gridding becomes general beyond the Mississippi, with fields, towns, and county roads aligned on an endless Cartesian grid. This is the consummation of Benthamite utilitarianism: a country laid out as neatly and dispassionately as the parcels on the Monopoly game board. But Benthamite utilitarianism is but one lobe of the American view of landscape, for America's colonists were not

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modern utilitarians, but Protestant dissenters with a biblical view of earthly life, who attached to the American landscape a set of ideas that was distinctly non-utilitarian.

It is a characteristic of American thought to overlay practical arguments with a moral program, binding the two so tightly together that they are virtually impossible to pry apart, even by the arguer himself. Nowhere is this more vivid than in the 1638 design for New Haven, America's first formally gridded religious colony. Its plan was a square divided into nine equal squares, arranged to recall the encampment of the Israelites in the wilderness as detailed in the biblical book of Numbers. Thus the American town might indeed be an uninflected grid of Cartesian coordinates, even as it embodied a communal encampment of pilgrims on a biblical journey. This is one of the leitmotifs of puritan culture since the seventeenth century, the conjuring of biblical time in American space.

The New Haven grid is perhaps the oldest physical expression of that mainstay of puritan sermons (and political rhetoric), the idea of the new world as the New Jerusalem. The orderliness and primness of the Protestant communities were saturated with ideas of the physical perfection of the New Jerusalem as detailed in Revelation. In Pietist communities, such notions could be taken to extremes, as with the Shakers who based their settlements and personal habits on an obsessive rectilinearity (and mandating that food be cut square and that plates never be passed diagonally). For them righteousness was inseparable from the right angle.

American colonists had no sentimentality for raw nature, and, throughout the seventeenth and much of the eighteenth century, accounts of the American virgin forest were almost completely bereft of aesthetic appreciation. Like William Bradford, colonists and travelers alike regarded it as a "howling wilderness." But nowhere is sentimentality about untamed nature a characteristic of young colonial societies. And with settlement a separate and distinct biblical interpretation came to supplant the idea of a New Jerusalem: the idea of America as Eden. Now the pristine American landscape was interpreted as a shard of paradise, somehow closer to God through its newness, where mankind might have a second chance. This was the vision of landscape that tantalized the Hudson River School painters, and as the landscape became progressively less pristine, the image of Eden became all the brighter.

The artist who painted the most enduring expression of this was, perversely enough, a member of that Protestant sect most indifferent to art: the Quaker painter Edward Hicks. An itinerant preacher, Hicks turned to painting after 1820, basing his career on the repetition of a single painting, his *Peaceable Kingdom*, a charmingly naïve painted sermon. In it he depicts the lion lying down peacefully with the lamb, surrounded by the beasts of the earth, while off in the margins William Penn makes his honorable treaty with the Indians for the purchase of Pennsylvania: Eden as benevolent menagerie under the stewardship of well-meaning Quakers.

During these same years, at the other end of the state, there unfolded an even more radical vision of America as Eden. This is the town of Economy, twelve miles north of Pittsburgh, built by the Harmonists, a party of celibate German millenarians led by George Rapp. Built in 1826, the same year that Cole emerged as a national figure, Economy was organized around a peculiar garden on the banks of the Ohio River, arranged in four quadrants to represent the four continents of the earth. America was represented by a wooded wilderness, in the midst of which was set a rough hermitage of massive unshaped boulders and a thatched roof. Behind its crude bark door was an interior of classical refinement, delicately painted and paneled, representing the paradise that awaits after the hard journey —either the settling of the wilderness or the Christian life. Both hermitage and garden survive, and are among the most haunting

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images of the American experience as a biblical enterprise, at once the settler's first cabin and Adam's house in paradise.

This was the Pietist view of the American landscape, but the intellectual version was not incompatible with it. Ralph Waldo Emerson had already abandoned his Unitarian ministry by 1836 when he wrote his celebrated essay "Nature," but his whole vocabulary remained profoundly religious. For Emerson nature was the physical embodiment of God—"Is not the landscape, every glimpse of which hath a grandeur, the face of him?"—into which man might project himself in a heady synesthesia, to become a kind of "transparent eyeball . . . part or particle of God." This doctrine, an amalgam of German philosophy and late eighteenth-century American deism, was the very crux of transcendentalism: divinity in nature served principally to make man aware of the divinity within. Emerson's transcendentalism bordered on pantheism, and contained a kernel of radical individualism that was rather different from Cole's Christian view of nature. Nonetheless, Emerson provided an approach to nature that integrated theology and philosophy, and gave to the American view of landscape an intellectual program of considerable vitality.

The assignment of spiritual and ethical values to nature, and the translation of these into the conventions of art, had a rapid and transformative effect on American culture. With few exceptions, the display of sensual or tactile qualities had not been the strong suit of American art. Since the colonial era, the characteristic form of expression was flat and linear, in which form was described schematically and aesthetic pleasure was subordinated to lucid storytelling or accurate description. This is that excessive lineiness that perennially afflicts American art. But the sudden success of the Hudson River School showed there was an enormous reservoir of untapped aesthetic longing, both urgent and passionate. And just as Calvinist Holland had once deflected its expressive energy from religious art to quivering still lifes of oysters and lemons, America now sublimated its artistic sensuality in landscape.

A German friend once asked me why so many popular American songs dealt with the railroad. I told him that in America the railroad was a symbol of freedom, representing the possibility of a new life in parts unknown. He responded that there could be no such thing in Germany; the railroad meant punctuality and an orderly arrival, and certainly suggested nothing indeterminate. (He was also mystified about American driving habits: was it true that Americans might go for a drive without having a destination?) It would not have occurred to my German friend to conflate the extensiveness of the land with human freedom, and yet an American does so reflexively. It is the theme of Central Park, where of all the competition entries Olmsted's offered the greatest expanse of open meadow, which he viewed as essential to the social program of the park. The habit of looking at the landscape in human terms was deeply ingrained in Olmsted, a fervent follower of Emerson, who had traveled extensively through the American South in the early 1850s on behalf of *The New York Times*. In a series of articles, Olmsted argued that the degradation of slavery went hand in hand with the atrophying of social institutions and the weakness of community. Convinced of the almost mystic connection between mental and physical freedom, he sought to apply the principle in his parks, working in broad swaths of open turf and field. His most radical idea is that an urban park should serve as the one place where America's social classes might mingle and interact, a concept he introduced in parks throughout the country, from Prospect Park, Brooklyn, to Golden Gate Park, San Francisco.

The idea of the uninterrupted physical continuity of space, whether in the endless grid or the endless meadow, lies at the heart of American landscape design. It is expressed in an idiosyncrasy of the American suburb that is found nowhere else in the

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world: the uniting of the front lawns of a street of houses into a continuous band of turf. This strip of unbroken green implies that the houses are set within an intact landscape, whose coherence is stronger than the fracturing into separate lots. With it the centrifugal nature of American society is overcome, at least visually.

This was the stunning innovation of Llewellyn Park, in East Orange, New Jersey, America's first great picturesque suburb—designed by the architect A. J. Davis and begun in 1853. The keynote of the entire project was continuity of landscape. It was intended for those of modest means, who lived in cottages set along serpentine streets that followed the contours of the land. No fences or landscaping was permitted to interrupt the flow of landscape, which culminated at the Ramble, an undulating swath of wild and undeveloped land, a new kind of public space that freely combined elements of the New England town common, transcendentalism, and Hudson River School doctrine. The houses themselves reciprocated the note of spatial openness, in the form of that other great idiosyncrasy of American architecture, the porch or veranda. Spreading along several sides of the house, it formed a viewing platform from which to enjoy the spatial continuity of the landscape; the architectural incarnation of Emerson's "transparent eyeball." With the open porch, the box of the house was rendered social and gregarious, and made spatially continuous with the surrounding land.

Llewellyn Park codified the elements that would define American suburban planning for the next century: winding streets, elm-shaded sidewalks and tree lawns. So strong are its philosophical and formal ideas that they are still recognizable, a century later, even in the radically pared-down version at Levittown.

In some sense, all these attempts to restore an intimate and integral connection with the landscape, for all their ingenuity and cleverness, are ultimately futile. For the suburban house itself must always represent the fruition of the process predicted in a Hudson River School painting, whose warning of smoke from a distant chimney is fulfilled with the building of a sleek subdivision. Nonetheless, in the effort to bind the house to the land, American architecture has produced some profound and tragic creations. Thomas Jefferson's Monticello is one of the most glorious of these, distinguished by that complete tactile awareness of the land had by surveyors and farmers, of which Jefferson was both (as was Washington). A Palladian jewel box from the front, Monticello masks a community of interlocking buildings at the rear, neatly bermed into the earth and connected by covered passages.

As the twentieth century unfolded, fewer and fewer American designers have had anything like the intuitive and personal connection to nature of the sort that comes from childhood experience on a farm. Frank Lloyd Wright, however, had it to an extraordinary degree. His Fallingwater assembled a heroic jumble of cantilevers above a waterfall, managing to suggest both an American boldness of treatment and an almost Japanese sensibility for the subtle juxtaposition of parts. Despite its sublimity, Fallingwater is still not the finest integration of a building into the landscape. This distinction must go to the gate lodge built by H. H. Richardson for F. L. Ames at North Easton, Massachusetts in 1880.

Henry Hobson Richardson (1838–1886) won fame for his heavily rusticated stone buildings that were nominally in the French Romanesque style but which shed their ornament and moldings over the course of his career until they suggested the physical presence of living rock face. The Ames Gate Lodge was Richardson's most literal geological essay: a megalithic round arched portal was set between two rubble wings, built of boulders so emphatically rounded that their outer edges project one or two feet beyond the face of the wall, the transposition of a glacial moraine into architecture (which was appropriate for a man

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who had studied at Harvard with Louis Agassiz, who had discovered glacial movement). Above the tumble of boulders, and drawing the meandering parts of the building together, was a low and continuous hipped roof of tile, relieved only by Richardson's characteristic eyebrow windows.

The landscaping of the Ames Gate Lodge was carried out by Olmsted, Richardson's friend, who took as his point of departure the moraine theme. Around the lodge he randomly strewed submerged fieldstones, which quicken in tempo as they near the building, and then seem to burst from the ground at its foundations. The implication is that the house itself was produced by some sort of subterranean upheaval. Ames was the treasurer of the Union Pacific, which completed the transcontinental railroad. He was also a Unitarian with an abiding interest in the natural landscape, and an interest in scientific horticulture (the gate lodge served in part as a winter garden). All these elements percolate in the building, which is at once poetic, scientific, and tragic. There is no more poignant statement of the American relationship to the landscape, and it is impossible to imagine it being created in any other country.

But the scientific strain in the Ames Gate Lodge reveals a different texture of American landscape thought in the years following the Civil War. While nature remained a popular theme, it was a nature that offered little Christian solace, as in the rather Darwinian seascapes of the late Winslow Homer. This was a nature no longer ruled by the personal God who gazed benignly over the Hudson River School landscapes, but nature as an impersonal machine, ruled by inexorable mechanical forces.

The cosmopolitan society of postwar America now found Hudson River landscapes naïve and vapid, preferring the sophisticated art of Europe. In particular their sentimentality offended the taste of the Gilded Age, whose verdict on antebellum culture is best captured in Mark Twain's savage critique of Cooper. In the face of this rejection, the titans of the 1850s scrambled to adapt, some of them finding patriotic subject matter in the American west. Those who could not adapt retreated from public view: Frederick Church to his Hudson River eyrie at Olana and Jasper Cropsey to the humble business of designing the stations of the Sixth Avenue elevated train.

This was more than the mere generational changing of the guard. It was the gradual receding from memory of the trauma caused by the loss of the natural landscape of the East. And in the languid art of the late nineteenth-century aesthetic movement the earnest solemnity of Hudson River School art seemed infinitely charmless and naïve.

How is it that the Western culture with the greatest reverence for nature, capable of such sublime works as Fallingwater and the Ames Gate Lodge, should have produced the ravaged landscape of the late twentieth century? It seems astonishing that such a vibrant and vital cultural tradition could be so unsettled by accidental outside factors. And yet this is precisely what one hears when the automobile is blamed for the loss of a coherent American vision of nature.

The automobile has ravaged the landscape, claiming enormous acres of countryside for new suburbs and deranging the careful equipoise of spatial elements that marked the old. After all, the suburb was based on the pedestrian, for whom the carefully graded sequence of tree lawn, yard, and veranda was calculated. But a community form based on the pedestrian encounter with nature adapts unhappily to an automobile culture, reflected in the disappearance of the tree lawn, invariably amputated by road-widening. With the disappearance of the pedestrian, the suburb has turned antisocial, exemplified by the shift from the gregarious porch to the deck, the private platform at the rear of the house.

If the automobile has had such a stark effect on the landscape, it is not perhaps because it is an alien intrusion, contrary to the spirit of American life. Its effects in Europe, for example, come nowhere near the level of

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destructiveness in this country. Rather, it is because the automobile fits so well into the American view of landscape, the long tradition of American antiurbanism and almost mystic sense of the permeability of space. Wright sensed this, and valued it, seeing in the automobile a kind of culmination of the American conquest of the land. In the 1930s and 1940s, he developed plans for the remaking of all of America in the image of the suburb, which he called Broadacre City. This was an attempt to complete what American society had always tended to do: decentralize, abandon the city, and dissolve into nature.

Of course, Broadacre City was no city at all, but a kind of continuous suburb, populated at a density of an acre per person. Where one once walked to a store in fifteen minutes, with the automobile one could drive to a distant one in the same time. Wright's utopian ideas were greeted with bemusement but in recent years Wright's prophecy has come to pass, as the majority of Americans now live neither in cities nor farms, but in concentric rings of suburbs, from which they commute not to cities but to still other suburbs. To some extent, America itself has become Broadacre City.

For all the recent depredations of landscape, the nineteenth-century assumptions about it linger. The modern American still tends to believe that the confrontation with nature is at the heart of our society, that nature offers didactic lessons, and that it is in some sense a repository of primal goodness in which man is an intruder. It is clear that the American preoccupation with the landscape is as intense as ever; it is less clear that this will again lead to important art. It has certainly been exploited by artists. In particular the thematic content of the Hudson River School has been reprised to a striking extent in movement called Land Art in the 1960s and 1970s. Its most famous creation was Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, a vast earthen spiral curling into Utah's Great Salt Lake, and evoking the archaic monuments of the American past, particularly those of the Mound Builder Indians. Now vanished beneath the rising lake, it has inspired countless imitations.

What is striking about much of this ecological art is the degree to which it combines a reverence for nature with a paranoia about civilization. Much of it lies in remote desert sites in the American West—for example, Walter De Maria's *Lightning Field*—making it inaccessible physically (perhaps also metaphorically), the first art intended not to be seen. The intruding observer of Hudson River School painting has been expelled. If America's landscape-based art was so successful and enduring in the past, it is because of the comprehensive doctrine on which it was based, where an exclusively Christian view of nature was wedded with Emerson's transcendentalism. Nature in one case had a collective meaning, and in the other a personal, but throughout the nineteenth century, despite the unending American tug of war between the individual and the collective, a general consensus prevailed. The products of that consensus include some of America's most important artistic creations.

In our century this broad consensus has dissolved into polarized positions: a Left that shelters a somewhat inchoate variety of environmental interest groups and a Right that has gradually relinquished its advocacy for the landscape, withdrawing to a utilitarian stance. A strange inversion has come about. Even as the American Right has inherited the traditional Whig platform, the American Left has come to represent something analogous to the Tory view of landscape. And this splintering is like the shattering of glass. The culture which sought to recreate Adam's house in paradise now finds its most characteristic achievements in the drive-thru on the highway strip or in the Unabomber's cabin in Montana.

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Atatürk's creation

by David Fromkin

Can traditional cultures in the third world break with the past in order to enjoy modern civilization? Ought they to do so? And at what price? Can a leader persuade or force his nation to make so drastic a change? Questions such as these were brought to the rest of the planet by the Europeans who explored, invaded, and settled the other continents in the years following 1492. Half-a-millennium later, we still are looking for answers to some of them.

I would have said that at least one thing seems clear. It is the apparent truth charmingly illustrated in *Anna and the King of Siam*: that a people cannot be made European—or modern or Western, call it what you will—merely by the fiat of their ruler, no matter how powerful he or she may be. I would have said it, except that it would have not been entirely true. For it is contradicted by the achievement of Mustafa Kemal in creating the modern Turkish Republic. That is what makes Kemal's story of more than intrinsic and historic interest. Indeed it is central to one of the great ongoing world dramas: the clash of modern civilizations with religious fundamentalists of various persuasions. Can the cause of modernization be won by politics, and from the top down? Is that what Kemal's story shows? And what, really, was Kemal's story?

Until recently, in English we depended upon the biography by Patrick, Lord Kinross (1964). Although based on wide personal knowledge and experience, as well as many interviews, Kinross's is an uncritical "official" account. It does not cite sources, which therefore cannot be checked. Kinross was a first-rate storyteller, so the book is a good read, but it is unreliable: many a tale sounds as though much improved in the telling. Kinross relied heavily on the myth-making account Kemal himself provided of his life and times in a six-day, thirty-six-hour speech to his political party in 1927. Kinross accepted this work of imagination as though it were strictly factual.

In the nearly four decades since the Kinross volume appeared, there has been a wealth of publications in Turkish, including many first-hand accounts by Kemal's associates and other eyewitnesses to the events. Some of this was made available to English-speaking readers in a biography by Vamik D. Volkan and Norman Itzkowitz (1984), which, however, suffered from being a "psychobiography," with a focus on psychological analysis of a person whom neither author knew.

For years, those who take an interest in these matters have been waiting for Andrew Mango to complete and publish his biography, which now has appeared and immediately has taken its place as the definitive study.[1] Born in Istanbul, Mango has been writing about Turkish affairs for more than forty years. He has a mastery of the sources,

1 *Atatürk: The Founder of Modern Turkey*, by Andrew Mango; Overlook Press, 539 pages, $35.

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and so at last we have an account that, episode by episode, is accurate and balanced. It reveals the long suppressed darker aspects of its subject, showing us a far more complex personality than we had seen before. Curiously, however, the main lines of Kemal's policy and accomplishments emerge as having been much the same as we had believed them to be in the past.

Mustafa Kemal was born in about 1880. We are uncertain of the day or month and have to guess even at the season: it may have been spring. Like most Muslims at the time, he bore only one name. He was Mustafa. Later, as a student, he assumed the surname "Kemal" (which means "perfection"). Later still, he obtained from his followers the name "Atatürk" ("Father of the Turks") and was called the "Ghazi": a warrior for Islam or the "Crusader."

In large part he created his own name, and also his own history. He was born in the Balkans. In physical appearance he resembled the Balkan people amongst whom his family lived: Slavs and Albanians. But his parents spoke Turkish as their native language, and when Mustafa became a nationalist he claimed that he descended from Turkish nomads who had settled in the Balkans in the service of their sultan.

Actually there was no such thing as a Turkish ethnicity. Turkish was, if anything, a language group. The Turkish-speaking warrior hordes that poured out of Central Asia beginning a thousand years ago were of mixed blood. Animists at first, they converted over the course of years to Islam. One such war band, the followers (according to tradition) of a certain Osman (hence "osmanlis," or, as they became, "Ottomans"), went on to build an empire that at its height half a millennium ago comprised the Arab-speaking Middle East, North Africa, and Balkan Europe all the way to the gates of Vienna.

The Ottoman Empire was a dynastic state: an assemblage of disparate lands and peoples having in common their subjection to the occupant of the Ottoman throne in Constantinople (today's Istanbul). The empire contained between two and three dozen "nations"—depending upon how nationality is defined. As generation after generation of Turkish warriors settled on the estates that were their rewards for military service, new warriors were recruited from among the conquered peoples, and acquired the Turkish language and the Muslim faith. Bulgarian Christians, thus converted, formed over the years a particularly large—and ever larger—percentage of "Turks."

The Ottoman Empire was a theocracy. It was a Muslim state, not a national one. A common religion provided the overriding loyalty that bound the peoples of the Arab-speaking and Turkish-speaking Muslim world together in one commonwealth. It was elsewhere—in the empire's lands in Christian Europe—that internal turmoil erupted. It was there that the full force of nationalism, unleashed by the French Revolution and Napoleon, was felt. The Ottoman retreat from empire at the start of the eighteenth century became a rout by the end of the nineteenth. It was assumed by outside observers that the disintegration would lead to total collapse. The chancellories of Europe hoped and believed that one day soon the Ottoman Empire would retire from all of its Balkan territories, but they worried that the scramble by the Great Powers to pick up the pieces might destroy the balance of power among them and lead to a general war. This was the famous "Eastern Question" that so bedevilled Great Power diplomacy throughout the nineteenth century. The concern proved to be justified. The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914, a consequence of the clash between Slavic and German peoples about who should have Bosnia when the Ottomans definitely lost it, led to the First World War.

Mustafa Kemal was born at the frontier: in Salonika, capital city of Macedonia. Salonika (today's Greek city of Thessaloniki) was a city largely Jewish and *Dun-*

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meh (a Jewish sect that had converted to Islam centuries before). It was a center of Freemason activity. Beyond the effective control of the sultan in Constantinople and his secret police, it was alive with subversive ideas. Macedonia was a province at the edge of the empire, coveted by Greece, Bulgaria, and Serbia, a prey to brigandage, and Ottoman troops sent to garrison Macedonia were subject to disaffection.

Kemal came into the world at a frontier in time. His was the last generation of Ottoman army officers. The autocratic Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1842–1918) instituted reform and modernization in his own despotic way, but lost ground to the advancing forces of imperialist Europe. Kemal and his contemporaries saw the empire dying before their eyes. In their own young lifetimes before the First World War, the empire lost much of North Africa and the Balkans.

Like other ambitious young men with few other opportunities, Kemal sought out a military career. The army provided an education and also an engine of change in an otherwise backwards state. Secret societies provided the only outlet for political expression in Abdul Hamid's domains, and, for evident reasons, the military secret societies proved the most effective. Modernization was the theme of their discourse, and warding off European control was their goal. As a young officer, Kemal played a notable role in secret society affairs, but he was eclipsed by the leaders of a group called the Committee for Union and Progress (CUP), more generally known as the "Young Turkey" party.

In the turbulent Macedonia of 1908, the Young Turks sparked off a revolt, followed by a coup d'état in 1913 that brought them to supreme power. They ruled thereafter with a puppet sultan, a brother of the deposed Abdul Hamid. The most conspicuous of the Young Turks, a self-promoting young officer named Enver who married the sultan's niece and made himself minister of war, was well aware of Kemal's abilities and commanding personality, and jealously made sure that he received only obscure appointments.

In power, the Young Turks were uncertain how to go about modernizing the ramshackle empire. Beforehand, they had committed to a partnership among all the two or three dozen peoples of the empire. The Young Turk triumph therefore was greeted with enthusiasm by those released from Abdul Hamid's tyranny. In Europe, too, there were many well-wishers; the British foreign secretary, Sir Edward Grey, was one of those who hoped the Young Turks would prove to be liberal reformers.

For whatever reason, the CUP government instead opted for the rule of Turkish-speaking Muslims (perhaps 40 percent of the empire's population) over Arab-speakers (perhaps another 40 percent) and others. Later Enver was to pursue an imperial fantasy: uniting his Turkish-speaking subjects with Turkish-speaking Central Asia so as to form a Turanian state stretching from the Mediterranean to the Chinese frontier.

In pursuit of yet another fantasy, Enver led his colleagues to enter the First World War—which was entirely unnecessary and in the end cost the empire its existence—and to bet on a German victory, which turned out to be a losing wager. Kemal, though an outsider powerless to change government policy, was never prey to such delusions. He was opposed to the war.

Despite Enver's best efforts, Kemal was given a chance to distinguish himself in the war. It was in 1915, when Allied troops invaded the Gallipoli peninsula, the European shore of the Dardanelles strait that leads from the Mediterranean via the Sea of Marmara, the Bosporus Strait, and Constantinople to the Black Sea. In overall command of the defense was a German general, Liman von Sanders, and he gave Kemal a battlefield command.

With the eye of a tactical genius, Kemal saw the key position on the peninsula, seized the high ground, and held it. Gallipoli, much written about since in the English-speaking world as an Allied failure and an historic tragedy, is remembered in

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Turkey as a triumph. Kemal emerged from it, and from the entire 1914–18 conflict, as a war hero of the Ottoman armies.

The defeated Central Powers—Germany, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman Empire—signed separate surrenders in the autumn of 1918. The Young Turkey leaders fled Constantinople and left the country. The feeble sultan was willing to agree to any terms imposed by the Allies, so long as he was allowed to retain his throne. In the event, these terms were harsh almost to the point of being Carthaginian. After wrangling among themselves for almost two years, the Allies forced the sultan's government to sign the Treaty of Sèvres in the summer of 1920, leaving the Turks very little in the way of self-rule.

In 1919 Kemal left for the interior of Asia Minor—what is now Turkey—on an official commission. He found Turkish army groups there that still were intact. In a move reminiscent of Charles de Gaulle, leaving France for London in 1940 after securing the allegiance to himself of French officers, who ranked above him, in order to carry on the battle, Kemal solicited and obtained the support of the commanders of these army groups. Thus began the War of Independence (1919–23) that led to the establishment, by Mustafa Kemal, of the Turkish Republic.

Britain, France, and the other main Allies had been forced by domestic public opinion and by sentiment within their armed forces to demobilize soon after hostilities ceased. They therefore commissioned Greece to employ its armed forces to impose Allied terms on Turkey. Greece was a principal beneficiary of those terms. But the landing of the hated Christian Greek soldiers in Asia Minor aroused passion in Turkish-speaking Muslims. Turks turned their backs on the sultan and rallied instead to Kemal's nationalist cause.

In defeating the Greeks, Kemal displayed strategic genius. He personally took responsibility—when nobody else would—for ordering his Turkish armies to abandon strategic locations in order to retreat deep into the interior of the country to give battle where he chose, with backs to the wall.

He also showed himself a master of diplomacy in playing off the Allies—Britain, France, and Italy—against one another, and Communist Russia against all of them. His toughness was evident in his dealings with the Soviets, taking what he needed from then and essentially giving nothing in return. He entertained no illusions about their ideology. He formed an "official" Communist party, loyal to himself, that could be joined by those who genuinely believed in Communism. A different fate was in store for those who took their directions from Moscow. A delegation of Turkish Communist officials that arrived from Russia was murdered. Their bodies were dumped in the harbor of Trabzon on the Black Sea. Local thugs did it, believing it, probably correctly, to be Kemal's desire. Later Kemal's soldiers killed the thugs.

Kemal was supremely disciplined in his approach to politics. In making peace with the Allies in 1922–23, he resisted the temptation to raise his demands when he won. Early on, he had outlined the terms he felt he needed, and never wavered from them. In this he was the statesman that Talleyrand wanted Napoleon to be—and that Napoleon never was.

The Ottoman Empire had lost its Arab-speaking territories in the war. Apart from a disputed border province in the south,[2] Kemal did not want them back. To be a modern country, Turkey would have to be a nation-state. In turn, that required a relatively homogeneous population, living in a coherent territory. To Kemal, the empire was a burden to be cast away. Out of its heart, he cut a cohesive new nation.

A British traveler in Ottoman lands before the First World War began his book, "How many people realize, when they speak of Turkey and the Turks, that there is

2 Hatay, which Turkey recovered from French Syria in 1938.

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no such place and no such people?"[3] That is one of the things that Kemal changed. Since 1923, there has been a Turkish state and a Turkish people. And Mustafa Kemal did it.

For Mustafa Kemal the conquering *Ghazi*, fighting the War of Independence was somewhat like riding a tiger. The forces that carried him to victory were not his own, and might well consume him in the hour of triumph. The Muslim mullahs were among the chief supporters of Kemal's revolt, enflamed by the Greek Christian landing. Yet Kemal aimed at disestablishing Islam in Turkey. The Young Turkey network had gone underground in 1918 in the autumn of defeat. It remained intact and provided an organizational structure for the nationalist cause. But its first loyalty was to Enver, who schemed to return to contest Kemal's leadership.

The army was the Ghazi's chief instrument, but its commanders expected to participate in a collegial leadership, while Kemal was a dominating personality who could not tolerate equals. From men as from women, he demanded and expected complete loyalty, unquestioning obedience, and what one can only call worshipful admiration.

Victory over the Allies in 1923 therefore was only the beginning. Mustafa Kemal turned next to the taming of his supporters. In scrupulous detail, Mango provides an account of the distasteful episodes in which Kemal drove old friends, allies, and colleagues out of public life. The low point was reached in purge trials that resulted in the hanging of innocents.

Secure in his position as dictatorial president, with a rubber-stamp parliament, a rubber-stamp single political party, and a firm control of an adoring army, Kemal left administration and details to his admirably efficient prime minister Ismet Inonu. Kemal had accumulated as much power in himself to change his country as any ruler possibly could have. It was, besides, really *his* country: he had created it himself.

Unlike third-world leaders today who argue that they can modernize their countries while at the same time retaining their traditional cultures, Kemal believed it necessary to go the whole way. His program was for Turks to become Europeans, and it was breathtaking in its sweep. He abolished the caliphate, and changed the country from a theocracy to a secular republic. He moved its capital city from Istanbul inland to Ankara. He instituted a unified secular education system. He introduced a civil code and emancipated women. He changed the sabbath from Friday to Sunday. He broke the Islamic ban on reproducing human images; statues and pictures were introduced. So was Western music. He ended the ban on alcohol and encouraged the growth of a wine industry. Sermons were to be delivered in the language of the country, Turkish, and no longer in Arabic. Then there was the change to the Latin alphabet and to Western numerals; the introduction of new words; the literacy drive. The traditional head pieces, the fez and the scarf, were banned. It was a total cultural revolution, imposed by one man's iron will and by the force of an army.

Kemal was a notorious womanizer. Knowing that Andrew Mango would tell the whole story, many have awaited revelations. Rather than stay with one woman, Kemal would try another, and was described as the "chief taster." His adoption of a half-dozen young girls aroused speculation. And his bringing in a black eunuch to serve them aroused gaudy tales. He drank to excess, and died of cirrhosis of the liver.

Mango does tell all, but what is of most interest is what he calls "the forced march to modernity." Can one modernize by marches that are forced? Nowadays a prevailing theory is that the information revolution and other aspects of globalization will bring previously backwards peoples into the modern world: that technology will modernize people, so to speak, from within.

Kemal's approach—commanding people to behave in a modern way—still is being tested. It is the attempt to modernize from

3 Sir Mark Sykes, *The Caliphs' Last Heritage* (1915).

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without or from above. It has brought Turkey to the verge of being European. But a devotion to religion and to the old ways remains. An elite, especially along the coast, has become thoroughly Western; in the interior there are many who have not.

The army remains faithful to its mission, reflecting its founder both in its strengths and in its limitations. It does not know what to do with a large minority in a nation-state, the Kurds in the Turkish Republic, because Kemal did not know; and it does not know how to expose the religious masses to the rationalist values of the secular world—in other words, to render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's—because Kemal did not know that either.

Kemal was a great soldier, a great diplomat, and a great world statesman. Mango tells us that above all he was a man of the Enlightenment, and "the Enlightenment was not made by saints." He believes that

> Atatürk's message is that East and West can meet on the ground of universal secular values and mutual respect, that nationalism is compatible with peace, that human reason is the only true guide in life.

It says much for the enduring value of his legacy that, despite his great flaws as a human being and the dark side of his dictatorial and often vindictive politics, his army remains loyal to him. Nearly eighty years after he led them to victory, his troops still would follow him to the ends of the earth.

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"Strange seriousness": discovering Daumier

by Roger Kimball

He was naked, and he saw man naked, and from the centre of his own crystal. . . . He approached everything with a mind unclouded by current opinions. There was nothing of the superior person about him. This makes him terrifying.
—T. S. Eliot on William Blake

Celui dont nous t'offrons l'image,
Et dont l'art, subtil entre tous,
Nous enseigne à rire de nous,
Celui-là, lecteur, est un sage.

C'est un satirique, un moqueur;
Mais l'énergie avec laquelle
Il peint le Mal et sa séquelle
Prouve la beauté de son coeur.
—Baudelaire on Honoré Daumier

There is surely no great point in this; the only point is life, the glimpse of the little snatch of poetry in prose.
—Henry James on Honoré Daumier

Familiarity is soul fat: it insulates and cushions, dockets the uncanny, translates every tomorrow into a rerun of yesterday. Do not scorn such anodynes. Be grateful for them. They help us negotiate a world that, when not actively hostile, is often the next worst thing: unexpected. Humankind, T. S. Eliot observed, cannot bear very much reality. Familiarity populates the unknown with hints of habitation. It reassures us with bulletins about the *déjà vu*, the *déjà vécu*. How beguiling of Plato to suggest that all knowledge is really an *anamnesis*, a recollection, a recalling to mind something that, deep down, we already possess. It would be pretty to think so.

We could not manage without familiarity. But our humanity cannot manage without continually defeating it. Art, like love, is a prime resource for perpetuating that antiphony. Art, like love, resists novelty with the gorgeous artifice of tradition: a bible of patterns and conventions that predate and outlive us, guiding practice with the gift of shared form. At the same time, art, like love, invests every pattern with a disarming, absolute "yes" to experience. That is part of its lure, its power, its majesty.

There are few artists whose raids on the familiar are more cunningly executed than those of Honoré Daumier. Each of us, probably, has a dozen or so caricatures by Daumier in his head: send-ups of kings, emperors, politicians, lawyers, doctors, blue stockings, art collectors, mythological personages, and the good, self-satisfied bourgeois citizens of nineteenth-century Paris: which are your favorites? Most of Daumier's caricatures are funny: they are also by turns sad, poignant, unflinching, and above all memorable.

The famous *Rue Transnonian* (1834) commemorates senseless slaughter as chillingly as Goya but without Goya's bombast or obscenity. The lithograph portrays a poor, working-class family mistakenly shot

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in its stark, disshelved flat by jittery troops from King Louis-Philippe's army. The image of the dead father lying spread-eagled on his back, half-naked, crushing the corpse of his infant into the floor boards, is a howling indictment of royal injustice. No wonder the king attempted to have all copies of the print confiscated and destroyed. (Daumier's employer, Charles Philipon, said of the print that it was "not a caricature . . . [but] a page of our modern history bespattered with blood.")

Daumier met brutality with exposure, folly with laughter, pomposity with a twinkling prod. His astonishing lack of sentimentality made him accurate; his unfathomable humanity preserved him from savagery. One critic called him "Molière with a crayon." Daumier could be amused, sorrowful, indignant, sharp: he was never vicious. Noting that the primary impulse behind caricature is "doubt or despair concerning man as such, a denial of the goodness or beauty of human nature," the German art historian Hans Sedlmayr nonetheless went on to observe that in Daumier the "lack of confidence in man is outweighed by a recognition of his greatness. Daumier saw the grandeur of man as did scarcely any other artist of the nineteenth century. Grandeur and absurdity are merged in him and so beget the tragicomic."

Many will be surprised by the extravagance of Sedlmayr's praise. What, after all, has a caricaturist—a satirist in ink—to do with "greatness" or "grandeur"? Caricature, as Henry James said in his essay on Daumier, is a kind of "journalism made doubly vivid." If Daumier makes us see the ways in which journalism "touches the fine arts, touches manners, touches morals," still "journalism is the criticism of the moment *at* the moment"—that is to say, occasional and hence generally ephemeral. Most of us will recall the several prints by Daumier we have encountered in histories of art or as illustrations for miscellaneous books (how often we see Daumier thus, "in service" as a prop to narrative) and wonder whether Sedlmayr's words are themselves a kind of caricature, exaggeration in the service of irony. Daumier's work is entertaining, yes; memorable, certainly; but most of it is so familiar, so accessible, so tied to particular occasions: how can we reconcile our deflationary if affectionate recollections with Sedlmayr's superlatives?

In fact, the more deeply we look into Daumier, the more apposite Sedlmayr's judgment appears. The most complete antidote to diminishing presumption is the monumental retrospective of Daumier's work now on view at the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C.[1] In this case, familiarity breeds consequence. Daumier the commentator and Daumier the comic quickly recede before Daumier the artist. It takes only a short while in this exhibition before we begin to understand why Daumier's friend Delacroix should have written to him to say "There is not a man I value and admire more than you." Or why Balzac (who met Daumier in the early 1830s) exclaimed, "This chap has Michelangelo in his system." As it happens, Michelangelo, an important model for Daumier, is also a frequent touchstone for those who seek to understand Daumier's work. In 1867, discussing *The Legislative Belly* (1834), one critic wrote that the celebrated lithograph was "a masterpiece of the same order as the Sistine Chapel." Like caricature itself, perhaps, this was an exaggeration that makes a point, a point reinforced by Daumier's friend Charles Daubigny when first he visited the Sistine Chapel: "Why, this is Daumier!"

Just about every aspect of Daumier's art elicited superlatives. In 1878, a year before Daumier's death, Degas declared him the

1 *Daumier, 1808–1879* opened at the Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C., on February 19, 2000 and will be on view until May 14. The exhibition was previously seen at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (June 11–September 6, 1999) and the Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, Paris (October 5, 1999–January 3, 2000). A catalogue for the exhibition has been published by the National Gallery of Canada (599 pages, $75).

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equal of Delacroix, remarking that to draw a leg as Daumier did required forty years of study. The young Rodin, when he saw Daumier's statuette *Ratapoil* (1850)—a caricature of Louis Napoleon—contented himself with an admiring, "What a Sculptor!" Writing about Daumier in 1922, Duncan Phillips—an avid early collector of Daumier's work—ranked him with "the greatest of the great." He acknowledged the many ways in which Daumier resembles both Goya and Hogarth, and then astutely pointed out that "Goya's satire was a matter of satanic hate and morbid revery and Hogarth's of didactic discourse on the frailties of human nature, whereas Daumier, like Balzac, was conscious always of having to do with the epic of facts and with the beauty of truth." Phillips dilated on Daumier's mastery of tonal harmony, above all his exquisite deployment of "velvety" black —"the queen," as Renoir put it, "of colors." (Sooner or later, almost everyone who writes about Daumier has recourse to the adjective "velvety" to describe his blacks; of particular note, however, is the way that Daumier's sumptuous blacks often stand in ironical contrast to his pedestrian or woebegone subject matter.) Even Velázquez, Phillips wrote, "never surpassed Daumier in revealing the sensuous colorfulness of blacks and ivory whites, nor are the shadows of Rembrandt more mysterious or marvelous as envelopment for figures."

High praise, this. Daumier's friend Baudelaire concurred. In his 1857 essay "Some French Caricaturists," Baudelaire expatiated on Daumier's "wonderful understanding of portraiture":

> While exaggerating and burlesquing the original features, he remained so soundly rooted in nature that these specimens might serve as models for all portraitists. Every little meanness of spirit, every absurdity, every quirk of intellect, every vice of the heart can be seen and read in these animalized faces, and at the same time everything is broadly and emphatically drawn. Daumier combined the freedom of an artist with the accuracy of a Lavater.

Baudelaire concluded that Daumier was "one of the most important men . . . in the whole of modern art":

> What completes Daumier's remarkable quality and renders him an exceptional artist who belongs to the illustrious family of the masters, is that his drawing is naturally colorful. His lithographs and his wood-engravings awake ideas of color. He evokes color, as he does thought.

It wasn't only Daumier's lithographs and woodcuts that sparked such enthusiasm. His paintings—which even today are much less well known—elicited similar encomia. For the great German critic Julius Meier-Graefe, Daumier was "a painter so mighty, that no terms can exaggerate the greatness of his importance." In *The Development of Modern Art* (1908), Meier-Graefe noted that although Daumier's palette tended to be subdued, he

> could be a great colorist upon occasion. He substituted a fluid strawberry red for his usual brown, painted blue atmosphere like Velázquez, pale golden backgrounds like the most refined of the Dutchmen, and invented contrasts of pink and orange which recall the Venetians.

Meier-Graefe also put his finger on an element that made Daumier so important for the artists who were his peers or followers, a roster that includes Manet, Van Gogh, Cézanne, Degas, Rouault, Giacometti, and Picasso. (How much of Daumier there is in Picasso's bittersweet clowns!) "A new art-language arose from Daumier's sketchiness," Meier-Graefe wrote, "at the syntax of which we are still working." Just as Daumier's caricatures laid bare with a few deft strokes the personalities and pretensions of their subjects, so his paintings conjugated a mood, an emotional reality with subtly modulated lozenges and triangles of color. The sketchy, "unfinished" quality that typifies Daumier's painting is not the sketchiness that aspires to but fails to achieve photographic exacti-

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tude but rather that articulate aesthetic precision that subsists on the far side of a merely tabulating delineation.

Daumier's measure is hard to take. This is partly because his work simultaneously caters to and exceeds our expectations. One of Daumier's lightest, most amusing series is *Ancient History*, which appeared in Philipon's satirical sheet *Le Charivari* in the early 1840s. (*Le Charivari* proved to be Daumier's chief outlet: he provided the magazine with some eight lithographs a month from its inception, in 1832, until 1860, and then again, after a three-year hiatus, until 1872.) A pompous, pot-bellied Menelaus leading a plump, shrewish Helen away from the smoldering ruins of Troy; a scrawny Narcissus leering goatlike at his reflection in a pool; a moronic Pygmalion, rapt that his new statue should bend down to share his snuff—the series presented the modern repetition of classical mythology, not (to paraphrase Marx) as tragedy but as farce. As Baudelaire noted, *Ancient History* was Daumier's answer to the great question posed by the vogue for neo-classicism: *Qui nous délivera des Grecs et des Romains?*—Who will deliver us from the Greeks and Romans? Daumier, Baudelaire wrote,

> came down brutally on antiquity—on false antiquity, that is, for no one has a better feeling than he for the grandeurs of antiquity. He snapped his fingers at it. The hot-headed Achilles, the cunning Ulysses, the wise Penelope, Telemachus, that great booby, and the fair Helen, who ruined Troy—they all of them, in fact, appear before our eyes in a farcical ugliness which is reminiscent of those decrepit old tragic actors whom one sometimes sees taking a pinch of snuff in the wings.

Daumier parodies, punctures, and delights with *Ancient History*. But the art historian Howard Vincent is surely correct that we return to those prints not primarily because of their satirical point but because of their aesthetic excellence. "The essential reason," Vincent wrote in his excellent study *Daumier and His World* (1968), "that these cartoons endure repeated study, yield increasing pleasure, lies not in their parodic gaiety but rather in the high quality of their draughtsmanship."

Daumier is enigmatic because he delivers so much more than he promises. He is enigmatic also because he is largely unknowable. He wrote essentially nothing except letters, precious few of which survive; the testimony of friends and associates is vague and often inconsistent; and Daumier's quiet temperament—he was, Vincent says, essentially "a spectator, not a participant"—does little to aid the biographer. About Daumier the man we have some scraps of fact, a number of charming but only intermittently reliable anecdotes, and a large province of conjecture.

As to the facts: Daumier was born on February 26, 1808 in Marseilles, the third child and first son of Cécile-Catherine and Jean-Baptiste Daumier, a glazier. Daumier *père* had unfulfilled literary ambitions. He wrote verse, managed to get some of it published, but was grieved that his genius was insufficiently recognized. He died insane in 1851. Some writers have conjectured that his father's literary aspirations helped young Honoré to set his sights beyond Marseilles and the glazier's trade. Perhaps so. In any event, the boy arrived in Paris with his family at the age of eight and at twelve was engaged as a notary's errand boy, a *saute-ruisseau*, which gave him a first taste of law courts and the "men of justice" he would later caricature to such profound effect. (The black gowns and hats of the French lawyers, punctuated by white cravats, must have been as irresistible to Daumier's eye as the proverbial lawyerly self-importance was to his sense of humor.) Daumier had little formal education. "The streets of Paris," Howard Vincent wrote, "were his school and college, his occupation and pastime. They were his career. They formed him, made him aware, and out of this awareness he himself shaped Paris and her people into the thousand forms of his prints and painting, a devoted record of his

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city." In 1821, Daumier took a job as a clerk at a bookstore in the Palais-Royale, near two important printsellers and the Louvre, where he undoubtedly busied himself making copies. His artistic ambition began to flower, and in 1822 he became a pupil of his father's friend, Alexandre Lenoir, a painter, archaeologist, and art collector.

We know little about Daumier's subsequent studies. He soon grew dissatisfied with Lenoir's training, which emphasized color and drew heavily on the examples of Rubens and Titian, and enrolled at the Académie Suisse and the Académie Boudin. By the age of fourteen, Daumier had begun experimenting with the new process of lithography, an inexpensive printing technique discovered by a German actor and playwright named Aloys Senefelder in 1798 and only lately come to Paris. In 1825, Daumier apprenticed with one Zéphirin Belliard, who specialized in lithographic portraits. He later worked with other artists. But it was not until about 1829, when he encountered Charles Philipon, that Daumier began to come into his own.

Philipon (1800–62)—described by one admirer as "le journalisme fait homme"—was an extraordinary figure. Together with his brother-in-law, he operated the Véro-Dodat Gallery, which specialized in satirical caricatures. But that was only a small part of his enterprise. The indefatigable entrepreneur, artist, journalist, and wit founded two of the leading satirical magazines of the nineteenth century, *La Caricature*, a weekly, and *Le Charivari*, a daily. In 1832, he started "L'Association mensuelle lithographique," a print-of-the-month club whose proceeds helped pay for the fines exacted by the censor for material that appeared in his other magazines. Some of Daumier's finest prints appeared in "L'Association mensuelle." It was Philipon who first fully exploited the potential of lithography for the popular press. It was he who devised the "Pear": the image of King Louis-Philippe that, in the hands of Daumier and his other artists (including Grandville, Gavarni, Descamps, and Monnier), came to epitomize the sovereign and his regime for the entire country. And it was he who wrote almost all of the captions for Daumier's early lithographs. Philipon collaborated with Daumier; he directed, incited, instructed, and—last but not least—paid him (though modestly). "If it had not been for Philipon," Daumier later acknowledged, "who goaded me like a driver his oxen, I would have done nothing."

Daumier was the perfect lieutenant for Philipon's assaults. Graced with an extraordinary visual memory, he never bothered with models. Graced with abundant technical fluency, he rarely bothered with preliminary studies: his touch was rapid, sure, and deadly. Philipon's implacable opposition to political injustice earned him the enmity of the censor, whoever happened to be in power. Louis-Philippe or Louis-Napoleon: it didn't matter—Philipon's magazines were regularly raided by the police. He and his artists were repeatedly fined and even, on occasion, imprisoned. Daumier had some share in this glory. At the end of 1831, he created his famous lithograph *Gargantua*. It portrays a bloated, pear-headed Louis-Philippe perched on a commode. The starving citizens of France struggle up a plank to deposit the country's treasure in his gaping maw. Down below, ministers and favorites scurry about eagerly with the sundry writs, honors, and ribbons that the king obligingly excretes. This ferocious sally in Philipon's philippic against Louis-Philippe was instantly proscribed. A six-month sentence against Daumier and others was initially suspended, but further outrages in *La Caricature* led to the reimposition of the sentence a few months later. In August, 1832, Daumier was arrested and incarcerated in Sainte-Pélagie prison: "a charming resort," he wrote to a friend, "where not everyone enjoys himself."

Largely because of *Gargantua*, Daumier is often compared to Rabelais. But, notwithstanding the scatological motif in that lithograph, Daumier's humor—indeed, his entire sensibility—is distinctly un-Rabelaisian. As Duncan Phillips observed, "of his

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four thousand cartoons, there is not one that is unclean, an amazing record for a French humorist." Daumier's work was often pointed; some of it was instinct with wounded righteousness; but throughout it all there is a current of affirmation and, ultimately, of serenity. By all accounts Daumier himself was a quiet, self-effacing man. His abiding sadness was a coefficient of his talent; excelling at caricature, he became its slave: first at *Charivari*, then at other satirical magazines. Time and again he attempted to get his work as a painter taken seriously. The Salon was frosty, the public uninterested. Caricature paid the bills, though barely. Still, cheerfulness kept breaking through. When a friend expressed concern about his parlous financial situation, Daumier replied, "What more do I need? Two fried eggs in the morning, and in the evening a herring or a cutlet. To that add a glass of Beaujolais, some tobacco for my pipe, and anything more would be superfluous." In 1870, the last year of the Second Empire, Daumier was offered the Legion of Honor, which he refused. He was not about to accept honors from a government he detested. But unlike Courbet, who was offered the same award, Daumier did not make a public drama out of his refusal. When Courbet asked him why he did not use the occasion to generate publicity, Daumier replied: "I did what I thought I ought to do. I am content, and it is no concern of the public."

It is peculiar how indistinct an image we have of Daumier. He had many friends, was reasonably social, but somehow his personality remains inaccessible. In 1846, Daumier married Marie-Alexandrine d'Assy, a dressmaker fourteen years his junior. The marriage was childless but was said to be happy—though in fact, as Vincent remarks, "about Daumier's family life virtually nothing is known." From 1863, Daumier and his wife rented a house in the summer in Valmondois, a village twenty miles north of Paris. One of the most charming anecdotes about Daumier is that his friend Corot eventually bought the house for him—a story that unfortunately turns out to be false. By 1872, when he retired from *Charivari* for good, Daumier's eyesight was failing from cataracts; by 1877, he was nearly blind. Two years later he was dead.

Daumier's output was prodigious: four thousand lithographs, one thousand woodcuts, almost three hundred paintings, nearly a thousand drawings, dozens of sculptures. In 1878, several friends organized a large retrospective of Daumier's work at the Durand-Ruel Gallery in Paris. Victor Hugo served as honorary chairman. It was a great moment for Daumier. Having just suffered through an unsuccessful operation on his eyes, he was unable to attend the exhibition. But at last he was beginning to receive notice not just for his clever caricatures but also for his paintings. Indeed, the exhibition—carefully designed to highlight Daumier's achievements as a serious painter—came as a revelation. Daumier the caricaturist the world knew or remembered. Daumier the artist was something else. One critic, after praising the exhibition, referred to Daumier as "This Titan who used all his strength against the pygmies." The show was a rousing critical success; financially, it was a disaster. The masses whom Daumier had pleased, goaded, and amused for decades stayed away *en masse*. According to one account, the exhibition recorded receipts of some 3,000 francs and expenses of nearly 13,000.

The present exhibition does not suffer that ignominy. It is a hit, and rightly so. Including some 250 works, it amply displays every facet of Daumier's *oeuvre*. There is only one thing to be lamented. In 1831, Philipon asked Daumier to make clay busts of the "celebrities of the *juste milieu*," the thirty-odd ministers and propagandists for Louis-Philippe's "middle course, as far," the newly crowned king promised, "from the excesses of the power of the masses as from the abuses of royal power." The painted busts were then made available as "clay snapshots" for the artists of *La Caricature*. Fashioned of unfired clay, the sculptures (now at the Musée d'Orsay) were too

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fragile to make the trip across the Atlantic. Instead, bronzes of the figures Daumier made are on view at the Phillips. They are no substitute for the clay originals. Still, assembled in a large vitrine, they make an impressive rogues' gallery, a phrenologist's delight, a psychologist's wonder.

Making one's way through the exhibition, one is struck again and again by Daumier's sheer deftness. With what remarkable *economy* he conjured up character! All of Daumier's most famous caricatures are here: the early *Masks of 1831*, a selection from the *Robert Macaire* series on which Philipon collaborated with Daumier, *The Physiology of the Bourgeoisie*, *The Men of Justice*, *Parisian Sketches*, *Theatrical Sketches*, *Ancient History*, *Ratapoil*, and others. Particularly amusing are two plates from 1862: *Nadar Elevating Photography to the Height of Art*—which portrays the famous photographer ascending over Paris, camera in hand, in his balloon—and *In the Studios*, which shows a group of critics or art lovers assembled in front of a painting: "Wow! . . . Amazing! . . . Gosh! . . . Superb! . . . it speaks!"

There is plenty to admire in Daumier's caricatures. But as at the 1878 retrospective, the real revelation here is Daumier's painting. Caricature is fundamentally an illustrational art. It exaggerates a physical quality in order to reveal an underlying moral or emotional reality. In the best caricatures, exaggeration evaporates in the light of a higher realism. Daumier was a master of this process. But his paintings, far from being caricatures in another medium, exist in an entirely different spiritual and aesthetic register. Discussing Daumier's painting, Duncan Phillips observed that although Daumier was celebrated as a caricaturist, "he was just as much a mystic." What Phillips meant, I think, is that Daumier's paintings inhabit a realm of feeling far removed from the hurly-burly of social and political satire. This is not to say that Daumier was a religious painter. He made a few paintings with religious themes—a Magdalene, a Saint Sebastian. But his best paintings—some family scenes, *Third-Class Carriage* (1862–64), *The Uprising* (1852–58), *The Fugitives* (1865–70), and several paintings of Don Quixote—are secular. Nevertheless, they possess rare depths of solitude and melancholy tenderness. This is true even of *The Fugitives*, which portrays the deportation of Republicans in the aftermath of the 1848 revolution, and *The Uprising*, a haunting, mysterious painting whose exact subject remains indeterminate.

Technically, Daumier's paintings were ahead of their time. The compression of pictorial space and simplifying expressiveness of his modelling look forward to Cézanne, the elongation of Don Quixote looks forward to Giacometti. Daumier's technique—his unwillingness to sacrifice aesthetic weight for superficial "finish"—is part of what makes his paintings seem so modern. I am not sure exactly what it is that makes them linger hauntingly in one's memory. Daumier's paintings are curiously beguiling. They exert a large immediate appeal, but their full force becomes evident only in retrospect. Only then do their margins of articulate silence become fully present.

Daumier presents us with innumerable aesthetic delights. He also presents us with a curious conundrum. There is a delicate but ineradicable sadness infusing many of his paintings. There is also, seemingly inseparable from that sadness, an inveterate joy. This paradoxical combination is perhaps most evident in his paintings about Don Quixote, the deluded apostle of chivalry. Daumier's great achievement is to make us see past the delusion to the human grandeur that inspires it. Noting that caricature explored "the innumerable different ways in which the human subject may *not* be taken seriously," Henry James went on to puzzle over the "strange seriousness" that characterizes Daumier's work. It is significant how many critics have paused to underscore that seriousness. Meier-Graefe did, as did Baudelaire. Ultimately, perhaps, it is Daumier's seriousness that so moves us and that led one admirer to remark that Daumier had Don Quixote's soul in Sancho's body.

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Martin du Gard's monster in a box

by Ben Downing

On New Year's Day 1931, the novelist Roger Martin du Gard (1881–1958) and his wife were seriously injured in a car crash, and they spent the next few months recuperating in a Le Mans hospital. That Martin du Gard had recently finished a solid first draft of the seventh installment of *The Thibaults*, the *roman-fleuve* he'd been trickling out since 1922, should, one would think, have been a source of some comfort to him during his long convalescence. But no: mulling in bed over his project, he came to the conclusions that this latest stretch of it simply would not do and that, to forfend against dithering, he had better torch the whole thing then and there. The replacement volume, *Summer 1914*, took another five years to complete, but Martin du Gard must have felt vindicated in his sacrifice when, the year after publication, it was singled out by the Swedish Academy in bestowing on him the Nobel Prize for 1937.

Nor was this the only time Martin du Gard unflinchingly abandoned work in progress. A methodical perfectionist, he never balked at crawling back to the drawing board. He objected that his friend André Gide tended to grow bored with his characters and hustle their demise; on his own fictional brood, meanwhile, he lavished infinite patience and pains. Descended from a clan of lawyers and stockbrokers, trained as an archivist and paleographer, Martin du Gard was a writer to whom rigor, prudence, and meticulous documentation came naturally. He built his novels up from notecards, minutely researched their historical milieux, and, like a sort of literary Stasi agent, even went so far as to compile dossiers on his characters. "I like," Martin du Gard pronounced, "for an author to exhaust his subject," and wear out his own he did—along, at moments, with his bleary-eyed readers. An acquaintance of mine recalls tackling *The Thibaults* one summer long ago, "But," he sighs, "the summer ended before *The Thibaults*."

It will come as no surprise that a novelist of such tortoise-like deliberation left behind him what the comedian Spalding Gray has dubbed a "monster in a box," which is to say an iron trunk containing a manuscript of leviathan proportions. At this magnum opus, to be called *Lieutenant-Colonel de Maumort*,[1] Martin du Gard had labored sporadically for his last seventeen years, but without illusion of ever bringing it to term. As he confided to his diary in 1942,

> It is a work that can grow and be perfected indefinitely, a work that will never be finished for me, and that, however, may at any moment be interrupted by my death. An ellipsis and an editor's note will suffice: "Here ends the manuscript of Colonel de Maumort, felled by a stroke the night of . . ."

1 *Lieutenant-Colonel de Maumort*, by Roger Martin du Gard, translated by Luc Brébion and Timothy Crouse; Alfred A. Knopf, 848 pages, $35.

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But nine years later, in his will, he pleaded for far closer editorial attention, leaving instructions for a hypothetical "devoted and industrious person" who, he hoped, would "turn the fragments of 'Maumort' to good account."

Martin du Gard's posthumous directive, although not half so daft as Joyce's mad scheme to surrender *Finnegans Wake*—also, incidentally, the product of seventeen years' toil—to James Stephens for completion, was no small order. For what he had bequeathed to posterity was a bewildering welter of drafts, files, newspaper clippings, quotations, even floor plans. Despite the efforts of a committee that included Malraux, Camus, and Gaston Gallimard, the refractory behemoth languished until at last one Professor André Daspre was found to tame it and reduce it to a manageable, if still hulking, size. Since even the indefatigable Daspre required five years for the task, it wasn't until 1983, a full quarter-century after Martin du Gard's death, that his *roman d'outre-tombe* finally ascended into the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. And now the translators Luc Brébion and Timothy Crouse have wrapped up *their* seven years of swink rendering *Maumort* for the first time into English.

Thus runs the tale of a trunk. Countless hours have been spent in doctoring its contents, and a fair number more will be needed from readers to weigh the massive results. Is the book really worth so many candles, especially yours (life being short and books many)? Brébion and Crouse, in their excellent introduction, declare *Maumort* to be "one of the greatest European novels of this century—if not the greatest," and Knopf's jacket-copy Cassandra foretells that it is "destined to be recognized as one of the summits of modern literature." Translators and publishers are to be permitted their hyperbole, of course, but still the magnitude of such claims invites skepticism and prompts me to take a long, hard look at this patchwork collosus.

Before inspecting *Maumort*, however, let me back up to consider its foreground. The first decisive event in Martin du Gard's life as a novelist was his encounter, at age seventeen, with *War and Peace*, which inclined him once and for all toward length and history; his devotion to Tolstoy never wavered. Then, in 1913, came his *annus mirabilis*, when he published his first novel of note, *Jean Barois*, broke into the *Nouvelle Revue Française* clique, and, perhaps most important of all, was taken up by Gide.

Theirs was one of the great literary friendships, lasting until Gide's death in 1951 and generating a voluminous correspondence. Although they had some things in common—for one, both were gay but miserably married—they differed vastly in temperament. The upright Martin du Gard was often exasperated, and even rather scandalized, by his confrère's antics, in particular his inveterate pederasty. (In his charming little volume *Recollections of André Gide*, Martin du Gard recalls reading his new play *La Gonfle* out loud to Gide:

> We were sitting at the water's edge. . . . Hardly had I begun to read when two very good-looking adolescent boys . . . began to lounge about on the jetty. . . . Gide at once took up my binoculars. "I'm still listening, Roger. Don't stop reading. Do go on." I read for an hour, but he never once put down the binoculars.

The moment Martin du Gard finishes, Gide lopes off after his prey.) They also parted ways over many points of art; "we're scarcely ever in agreement," admitted Martin du Gard. Gide pursued "vertical" novels (his term), Martin du Gard broad, fresco-like ones. Each had his Russian master: Tolstoy for Martin du Gard, Dostoyevsky for Gide. And yet, despite these variances, each held the other in the highest esteem and found in him a lively, challenging foil.

Gide was also instrumental in launching his friend's career. In marked contrast to his notoriously scornful rejection of another 1913 novel, a certain *Swann's Way*, his endorsement of *Jean Barois* couldn't have been warmer: "A publier sans hésiter," he urged

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Gallimard. Having only glanced at the novel, I shall stick to a brief summary of it. Its eponymous hero, after scientific studies, disowns his Catholic upbringing and becomes a paladin of rationalism and an ardent Dreyfusard, but then, on his deathbed, repents of his apostasy and nips back into the fold. A curious feature of the novel is its dramatic form: consisting mostly of dialogue and stage directions (interspersed with letters, extracts from pamphlets, etc.), it looks on the page much like a play.

As for *The Thibaults*, it is, plainly put, a family chronicle. The novel opens with the following deliciously tawdry donnée: Jacques, the teenage younger son of M. Oscar Thibault, a pillar of Catholic rectitude and every inch the stiffnecked paterfamilias from hell, has made a love-pact and subsequently run off with—horror of horrors!—*an Huguenot boy*. The two are soon nabbed near Toulon, and Jacques is clapped into the reform school his father ostentatiously sponsors. Next, the elder son, a doctor named Antoine, persuades his father to release the budding Rimbaud (Jacques is by way of being a poet) into his fraternal custody. Despite Antoine's attempts to disarm the prodigal, he remains stonily remote and eventually bolts again, this time seemingly for good. At last, however, Antoine tracks him down in Lausanne and persuades him to come home, where his father is expiring. Less than a year after M. Thibault's death in 1913, Jacques gormlessly gets himself killed attempting to airdrop pacifist tracts over the front lines of World War I. For his part, Antoine succumbs to the ravages of poison gas just days after the Armistice is signed.

So, in abridged form—a second, interwoven plot concerns a Protestant family, the Fontanins—unfolds *The Thibaults*. All in all, it's a mixed bag. The first book mesmerizes, and the sixth, *La Mort du Père*, is a gut-wrenching tour de force in which M. Thibault suffers one of the slowest, ghastliest, and most affecting terminations in all literature. Elsewhere, though, the novel bogs down, and the whole suffers from a pervasive ponderousness and lack of humor. Some of this may owe to the rather creaky translation by Stuart Gilbert (the crony and exegete of Joyce), but it has more to do, I think, with Martin du Gard's obesity of touch. For instance, he is forever informing us that a given character feels "profoundly moved." *The Thibaults* shares the faults of George Eliot at her worst and some, but by no means all, of the sublime virtues of Eliot at her best. (That Martin du Gard admired Eliot shows.) *The Thibaults* is a deeply serious, intermittently beautiful novel of great gravitas and dignity, but also, at times, a bore.

The premise of *Lieutenant-Colonel de Maumort* is simple yet elegant: a cultivated old soldier, mewed up in a wing of his château during World War II (the Nazis having commandeered the rest of it), embarks on a diary wherein he reviews his life and times; his memoirs are what we read. That Maumort has been assigned the convenient birthdate of 1870 points up the fact that the novel also is meant to serve as a sort of private, partial history of the Third Republic with which he is coeval.

At first we seem to be stuck with a rural version of the dour Thibaults. As with Jacques Thibault, Bertrand de Maumort's mother died giving birth to him, and his widowed father is similarly massive, brooding, and formidable. Luckily the dreariness of life at le Saillant, the family estate, lifts with the arrival from Paris of his cousin Guy, rusticated in a futile bid to stave off tuberculosis. An effete little flirt, Guy soon tormentingly lures the boys' tutor, Xavier, to the brink of molestation. Whereas the hetero sex scenes in *The Thibaults* were soft-focus embarrassments, all heaving bosoms and bedroom eyes, the lurid encounters here are sharply drawn and often droll. Thus Maumort, a perturbed bystander to these seductions, observes Xavier, in the course of a massage, "sliding his arm under Guy's body and turning him like a crêpe."

But soon Maumort is drawn into homoerotic mischief of his own, and his evoca-

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tions of "boarding-school depravities"—frenzied mutual onanism, mostly, indulged even in the classroom—are hilarious. Martin du Gard, I hasten to qualify, was not in any significant sense a "gay novelist," and he no doubt would have been mortified to be so pigeonholed. Gay sex is described for the same reason, it would seem, that straight sex is, because it's part of human experience, to whose variousness and totality Martin du Gard, ever the Tolstoyan, was firmly committed. This being said, he pulls off the former far more convincingly; homosexuality, which Maumort soon repudiates, charges these early chapters with much-needed humor and a pungent excitement.

Martin du Gard is superb as well at depicting the mingled terrors, humiliations, glories, and rewards of French pedagogy, with its almighty *baccalauréat*. In some of his best passages, he captures the electric thrill of genuine learning, as here where Maumort conjures up an early teacher, a spinster named Mlle. Fromentot:

> I can still hear her reedy voice when she dictated a novel by La Fontaine, for whom she had a decided predeliction and a kind of emotional kinship. She had a somewhat simpering but quite piquant way of putting the best passages into relief, of bringing out the irony, the vividness of a turn of phrase, the verbal skill, the subtlety of a text. . . . Mademoiselle lost no time in leaving La Fontaine behind for more difficult authors—Fénelon, La Bruyère, La Rochefoucauld, Vauvenargues. (Is this not a surprising selection for a humble schoolteacher from that distant era?) At eight or nine, I was familiar not only with the names of these great writers but with the cast of their minds as well. It also seems to me that I was already vaguely aware of the rhythm, the music of the sentences, the choice and combination of the words—in sum, of style, of the genius of the language.

How fine French writers often are on the pleasures and niceties of style, how properly rabid! (Indeed sometimes fatally so: Edmond de Goncourt reports of his brother Jules that, "I am convinced he died of . . . the *travail of style*.") This passage also serves, of course, as a handy illustration of Martin du Gard's—or Maumort's—own style. The Maumort manner is suave, smug, expository, a little orotund, and pleasingly affected—just the thing, in short, for a jaded, rather pompous old sophisticate such as our diarist. In a vintage bit of solemn Gallic rhapsodizing, one of the book's *blurbistes* gushes, "I stand before this prose as I would before a Vermeer, telling myself sadly that here is a perfection whose like will never be seen again." Well, then. I, for one, prefer to take my prose sitting or lying down, which perhaps explains my being slightly less bowled over. Still, *Maumort* truly is impressive for the haughty polish of its prose. While I have not seen the original, I see no reason to doubt that Brébion and Crouse have done faithfully by it. This is, after all, the kind of decorous, non-vernacular style that best survives the passage between languages. At any rate, *Maumort* reads convincingly in English.

To return to the plot: after gaining his *bac*, Maumort attends both the Sorbonne and the military academy of Saint-Cyr, all the while boarding with his Parisian relatives, the Chambost-Lévadés, who host, every Sunday, a glittering salon frequented by a who's who of *belle époque* eggheadom: Taine, Pasteur, Renan, and so on. At these "conclaves of all the prelates of contemporary thought," Maumort witnesses incredible feats of mental acrobatics, such as his Uncle Eric's "quoting, in the same sentence, Callimachus, Milarepa, Kierkegaard, and Gibbon" (try that at home, boys and girls), but also moments of highbrow tomfoolery, as when he sees "Alphonse Daudet . . . grab the garden hose and threaten Guy de Maupassant with an improvised shower." Maumort treats us as well to one more detailed portrait, of Ernest Renan, a gregarious butterball who, "blowing like a sperm whale," speaks in "rectorial circumlocutions" and inveighs tirelessly against Bossuet as a "big windbag." According to Das-

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pre, Martin du Gard planned to have Maumort sketch a score or more of these *eminents penseurs*; the mind boggles at the thought of how much bulk this projected gallery would have added to the novel.

So far, so good. The first two-hundred-odd pages, covering Maumort's childhood and adolescence, are richly immediate, and the next seventy-odd are sustained by a colorful pageant of real-life grandees (or, to put a harsher spin on it, by arrant name-dropping). Yet even in this second section a troubling change has occurred: Maumort has largely dropped out of his own story. That the star-struck Maumort, who likes to think of himself as a detached observer of life's parade, should thus abstract himself has a certain logic, but as a consequence the intimacy and fluidity of the early pages are disrupted, and never quite regained. A related problem is that the novel begins increasingly to break into blocky set pieces ("The Intellectual World of Paris around 1890," runs one painfully blunt chapter title). No doubt Martin du Gard intended to fuse these pieces into a seamless whole, but who cares? The grim fact is that, as it stands, the novel loses all momentum and sense of purposeful direction before Maumort is out of his teens.

Nor is this falling-off due only to incompletion, for Martin du Gard also squanders his own steam by interpolating, smack in the middle of the book, another text. The gambit is this: after the suicide of his former tutor Xavier, Maumort finds among his papers a fifty-page diary describing his calamitous debauchment of a village youth. "I see no reason not to reproduce this pathetic story," says Maumort, and proceeds to do just that. Now wait a minute. Xavier's narrative is engaging enough, but what is it doing *here*? Why in the world would a man copy out another man's confessions in his own? A diary within a diary within a novel: this is too clever by half. The success of *Maumort* substantially depends, after all, on our playing along with the pretense that it is not a novel but a memoir, and for a while Martin du Gard nicely floats his generic mirage. But he's unable to leave well enough alone, and in goes the kitchen sink.

By the time we veer back to Maumort, the trail has gone cold. We hear, desultorily, of Maumort's affair with a *martiniquaise* and his odious, cliché-riddled views about the "incorrigible childishness" and simianity of blacks; of his involvement with the tight-knit Saint-Gall family, one of whose daughters he marries; and of sundry other far-flung matters. But the central events of Maumort's life—the death of his wife and two sons, his colonial service in Morocco and participation in World War I—are barely touched on; we learn of them largely not from Maumort himself but from Daspre, who increasingly must step in to fill the yawning gaps. And, perhaps most problematic of all, Maumort himself is unfinished. He was to have been a living diptych, a person of (in his own words) "two natures," both a "meditative type" and a "man of action"; the skirmishes of Paris salons were to have been echoed by still bloodier ones in the Maghrebi desert. Martin du Gard had big plans for Maumort's army career, including a close relationship with Marshal Lyautey, architect of the Moroccan protectorate, and a temporary rupture over the Dreyfus Affair—all unexecuted. "Maumort's double education," Daspre tells us, "his intellectual and military duality, would have been at the root of a conflict whose dramatic power can easily be imagined." Great.

To be fair, the novel recovers somewhat toward the end. Although far from complete, the part devoted to World War II is fascinating in that it splits into two quite different versions, presented sequentially by Daspre: in the first Maumort huffily avoids the Nazis who occupy le Saillant, while in the second he engages them in debate and privately taxonomizes them. Here, for example, Maumort studies the type of the bumptious, condescending Hun:

> No illusions as to what he thinks of me. His politeness does not fool me. Without any

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> doubt, he takes me for an ordinary specimen of a bygone age, a fossil contemptible twice over, both for belonging to the bourgeoisie and for displaying the form of intellectual curiosity which tackles everything and settles nowhere, which inevitably leads to indifference or skepticism and makes a man unfit for any strong conviction, for adherence to any doctrine. One day he said to me, of Goethe—and it would be hard to compress more false ideas into so few words: "Goethe, that *eclectic intellectual*, who has done so much harm."

Yet Maumort is no knee-jerk hater of Germans, and in this he resembles his creator. Martin du Gard, like his fellow Tolstoyan and Nobel laureate Romain Rolland (to whom Maumort approvingly alludes), had been fairly Teutonophilic and was dismayed by the rise of Nazism. In grafting on to Maumort his own propensity and resultant anguish, Martin du Gard violated his self-imposed separation of author and character—"Maumort must be very different from me," he told himself—but the novel gains thereby, since Maumort's betrayed love for Germany imparts a sharp tang and historical pathos to these final pages of his memoir.

But hold on; Daspre isn't nearly done with us. On to the main text he has tacked a sort of giant appendix, one resembling those "Posthumous Papers" that make up a good portion of *The Man without Qualities* by Martin du Gard's almost exact contemporary Robert Musil. The first part consists of letters by Maumort; late in the game, Daspre explains, "Martin du Gard had the idea of recasting the novel in epistolary form." (Earlier he'd toyed with the notion of retrofitting it as "a series of interrelated short stories told in the third person.") The nine missives he got around to feature some fine passages, but it's hard to see how Martin du Gard could have jiggered the entire book to fit under this new rubric, which seems to me even more confining and less plausible than that of the diary.

The remainder bears the intriguingly sinister name of "The Files from the Black Box." It seems that, besides his iron trunk, Martin du Gard handed down a black box measuring, Daspre informs us in a moment of Kinbotean overkill, 15.7 in. x 19.7 in. x 15.7 in. and filled with seventy folders of preparatory material, some in Maumort's voice and some in his author's. Thus File 22, Section 12 concerns "*Maumort's philosophy. To accept man's inconsistency*," while Section 15 deals with "*Maumort. Duty of irony towards oneself*." There are a few spiky highlights in this interminable catalogue, as when, in 30.2 "*Feminism*," we glimpse Martin du Gard scheming to splice into Maumort a virulent strain of misogyny:

> Woman is an unfortunate and incomplete animal that can only live under supervision. Women's real misfortune began with their emancipation. All the emancipated women I have known were dying of it.

(Perhaps Maumort—the man, not the manuscript—is the *real* ogre in this box.) And it can be oddly compelling to spy over Martin du Gard's shoulder as he prods himself ("Establish Maumort's difficult character right away") and roughs out Maumort's snobbishness ("There is something *uncultured*, in spite of everything, in a man of common birth, Maumort will think").

But overall "The Black Box" is a repository of tedium; dedicated indeed would be the reader who delved to its bottom. "Black Box": I can't help but think of cockpit voice recorders, those chroniclers of catastrophe always pinging from the ocean floor, and the coincidence is not, I think, irrelevant.

Exactly what then *is* this sprawling, half-wrought book, this *Lieutenant-Colonel de Maumort*? To begin, one must distinguish between what Martin du Gard intended and what he accomplished.

There exists a strong French tradition of the memoir-novel, whose golden age was the eighteenth century; a subset of the genre, epitomized by several works of Antoine-François Prévost, is the memoir-novel narrated by a fictional character, but

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through which historical personages amble. Perhaps Martin du Gard, who thought of Maumort's sensibility as "rather eighteenth-century," had this lineage in mind. For their part, the translators propose that we think of *Maumort* as a *livre somme*, a terminal compendium of experience. Sure, why not. Another set of considerations: that Maumort is born in 1870; that his very first sentence is "My sleep has always been light and intermittent" (cf. "For a long time I would go to bed early"); and that he entertains musings like "at the bottom of my memory, it is as if there lies an unending rosary of memories which are buried and which I think lost"—all these hint at a challenge (mounted unconsciously?) to Proust.

Whatever the grand design, it went unrealized, and probably always would have done; even had Martin du Gard beavered away for a millennium, I suspect, he wouldn't have rounded the book into right fullness and concinnity. And so the actual achievements of *Maumort* are free-floating, discrete: its supple prose, period fidelity, and, yes, complexity of character. Maumort, even lacking his man-of-action dimension, is a knotty and engrossing creature. Smart, insightful, and possessed of a flair for verbal portraiture, he is also bloodless, aloof, and coldly analytical; underneath his busy probing curiosity, he turns out to be almost misanthropic. Maumort reminds me a little, strange to say, of Charles Ryder, the narrator of *Brideshead Revisited*, in that both men, bored and disillusioned during World War II, gaze wistfully back across their lives; both become entangled with a large, glamorous family through one of its sons, marry one of its daughters, then fall out with the whole lot of them; both go on missions to Morocco; and both end up terribly deadened and alone.

In the balance, *Maumort* seems to me less one of the great novels of the twentieth century than an estimable fragment of the nineteenth. For Martin du Gard is, in his sedulous realism and leisurely amplitude, fundamentally old-fashioned, an epigone; except for his regrettable habit of shoehorning extraneous matter into his books, there's nothing all that modern about him. Brébion and Crouse, making a virtue of accident, have persuaded themselves that "the repetitions, the disunities, the mixture of different literary forms . . . give the novel an invigorating rawness" and, in fact, "end up heightening its artistic value." Nonsense. This is to tag Martin du Gard as a modernist manqué, or even malgré lui, and to argue against the smoothly grained atavism for which he strove.

I mean neither to disparage Crouse, Brébion, and Daspre, who are blameless, nor to imply that *Maumort* should have been left to molder in its iron trunk or some library. As with *The Thibaults*, it does attain to a certain augustness, and its shored-up incompletion does indeed render it an unusual, if deeply frustrating, read; we feel, as the translators aptly suggest, like "an intruder peering into private papers." The book may well prove most interesting to novelists (one of whom I'm not) as a sort of cautionary object lesson, a peek inside the laboratory of a skillful but overwhelmed and vacillating Dr. Frankenstein.

"Why harness myself body and soul to this new work," Martin du Gard once fussed concerning *Maumort*,

> since I now know the limitations I cannot go beyond. . . . In order to do something worthwhile, one has to take oneself momentarily for Goethe, and believe that one is going to write *Faust*. Illusions of this sort are forbidden to me, and nothing will change that, neither the Nobel Prize, nor Gide's approbation.

A good question, evincing Martin du Gard's winsome humility, and one that leads me to wonder whether he wouldn't have blanched at this puffery about his cumbersome, not-even-close-to-finished novel being one for the ages. *Roman* this, *livre* that: call it what you will, *Lieutenant-Colonel de Maumort* remains, as its rather obviously thanatoid name suggests, a tome that never quite got itself off the table.

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Two poems
by David Yezzi

Epithalamium

for Ben and Michele

If we, who have gleaned from towns jutting through fog
how clarity comes in season by season,
revisit the places we've been happy, then this
will be one. Already, we imagine, you're away
twisted in foreign linen, recalling our faces, oval-lit,
flushed, unglued from so much wine.
Even as the sleep you've put off past midnight works in
like footfalls at your streetside window,
there's time for one last thought: that tomorrow holds
another day like this. The sun-spanked piazza,
with its chugging fountain and stairs astride the canal,
will press you in afternoon heat until dinner,
then bed.
Over the terracing earth, our common friends
eat, or furl curtains at an old-city casement,
or scatter for mountain finches a handful of seed.
One threads an alley in a crosstown taxi
to a lover, while another sits leafing the elder Disraeli
in a dog-eared edition, or tucks a blanket
round the ears of a child who woke shrieking in darkness
from a dream of lost home. It's for us,
as for yourselves, you do this thing. Beyond tonight, we,
who have seen in you, both singly and together,
a perfection, know nothing again may be wholly gainsaid.
And if the fealty of one for the other

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constitutes a rival good to God's, then it is a balm
He has allowed the solitary.
The gypsy
confides: so much of what lies ahead hides from us,
as you estimate which she has more of,
gatos or teeth? Of course, she's right about mystery.
So for what you knew before, you pay her,
and know it a second time, more fully now. *Ask your question*
in two-times-twenty years, Signore. Ask her.
She will take your hand, and, still your bride, tell you
something of why you strayed in company. . .
with children, cronies, two fur-balls; parents gone.
Like a scintilla discharged from flints,
what catches the eye at night becomes the memory you keep;
just so, the offshoots of our lives become our lives.

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Casco Passage

i.m. Paul Wood, d. 1999

By midday, gouts of fog
sock in until
we almost think the weather means some harm,
the way it spills over the harbor. Gauzy,
a trawler on its mooring
sputters close to home.
A level calm.
Seams smoothed, the clouded archway shadowless:
our view lacks eye-holds, like the papered set
of a photo shoot, merely
figure and ground.

This morning, as we slept,
his boat was found
grinding in circles somewhere near the reach.
A fisherman came on it stymied there,
recrossing in the spume
of its own wake, its wheelhouse
ghostly, its course
a ring by Titian charcoaled in the sea.
We knew his name. And when it made the news
the dust of pickups rose
to clog the road:

men set out dragging rigs
that yesterday
had yanked up heavy, bruised with mussel shells,
Phoenician purples clustered in a fist.
Today, they're hoisted limp—
a heartache and relief.
One snarled clue:
some fouled line sliced from a sinking trap.
Had it jerked him in a whip-crack overboard,
strength sapped as he flailed
to loose his boat?

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Now shoals of mackerel lash
in running shallows,
each silver leap skyward through glass survived.
Down on the point, a few last headlights glare,
then swing wide, then go.
I have come to the shore
to clean a pail,
while you close out the damp in half-lit rooms.
A year ago, we married near this spot,
where four white pine trees stare
over the bay.

All week, his wife can watch
hope's half-life split
daily until the hour she knows he's gone.
But for now: she looks on as he swims
ashore—"he's strong, you know?"—
chokes breath on sand . . . *No sign*.
Word goes round,
as stories of near-misses start in town:
"Remember in the south, that killing gale?
After a second night,
with the helm

an icy sledgehammer
whanging my ribs,
I leaned down to your mother, who for days
could not look at the waves as high as roofs.
'We'll die out here,' I told her,
letting the tiller go;
'I'm so damn tired . . . '
The wind was through with us two hours later.
Half-sunk, we made land under perfect skies,
boys out hauling nets
struck by the sun."

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London journal

Modishness & Blairishness

by John Gross

This May, for the first time, London will be electing a mayor. The post shouldn't be confused with that of the Lord Mayor—the one with the golden coach, the one whose office goes back to medieval times. The Lord Mayor's jurisdiction is confined to "the City," the ancient square-mile core of London, and in practice his role is almost exclusively ceremonial. The new mayor will be presiding over the whole metropolis—the richest city in Europe. His powers will be more limited than his title might suggest, but they will still be very extensive; and he will have a budget to match.

The mayoral scheme was cooked up by the Blair government, in much the same spirit that it has promoted devolution in Scotland and Wales. Whether it is a good idea is something which can be argued over (and has been). What is not in doubt is that in pursuing it Blair has created a rod for his own back.

London is Labour territory, especially in the current climate, and it can hardly have failed to enter into Blair's calculations that the city seemed bound to elect a Labour mayor. What he didn't reckon on, however, was that the most popular contender for Labour candidate should have turned out to be Ken Livingstone—now an MP, formerly (and disastrously) leader of the old Greater London Council, which was abolished by the Thatcher government in the 1980s.

Livingstone's general position is sufficiently indicated by his nickname "Red Ken," but no shorthand term, not even "sinister buffoon," can adequately convey the flavor of his personality, or of his political approach. His buffoonery is in fact under careful control. He specializes in stunts, but he is also a shrewd operator, who became leader of the Greater London Council by ejecting his predecessor, a moderate, in a ruthless putsch. Since putting himself forward as potential mayor, he has made it clear that, though he is capable of singing different songs on different occasions, he hasn't essentially changed. The city he hopes to govern may depend heavily on its role as a financial center, for instance, but that hasn't prevented him from coming out strongly in favor of the anti-IMF riots in Seattle: his only regret, he said, was that they weren't better organized. It is a statement which has been widely publicized, but it doesn't seem to have done him any electoral harm.

Tony Blair, who is shallow but not stupid, went into action as soon as Livingstone entered the fray. He recognized that a Livingstone regime in London would not only have many policies running counter to his own, but that it would also provide the left-wing opposition within the Labour party with the rallying-point which it has lacked since he became leader. After some complicated in-fighting, he and his colleagues settled on a machine politician called Frank Dobson as their choice for mayoral candidate, and threw their full

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weight behind him. They needed to, since Livingstone commands the support of many party activists and trade union leaders.

In the event, when the vote was taken, they managed to push Dobson through as the official candidate, but only after some blatant vote-rigging and rule-bending—and even then only by a very small majority. "We wuz robbed." Livingstone then went in for two weeks of apparent dithering (though it is more likely he was teasing), after which he announced that he was going to run as an independent. At present the opinion polls suggest that he is heading for a landslide victory. It is up to Blair and his fabled spin doctors to show what they can do in the few weeks they have left.

The politics of a foreign city probably have only a limited charm for most readers of *The New Criterion*, but the mayoral race in London also raises cultural questions of more than municipal import. The most significant is the alarming popularity of Ken Livingstone with the general public—a popularity which rests less on policies than on style. (He is as much a practitioner of gesture politics as Blair.) But the ethos of the Dobson camp has its disconcerting aspects, too, and a tiny recent instance seems worth citing. It is trivial enough, but interesting in its implications.

One of the most powerful local politicians in London is a former television presenter called Trevor Phillips. For a time he aspired to be a candidate for mayor himself, but he eventually agreed to throw in his lot with Dobson. He is in effect Dobson's number two, and likely to have the pick of whatever jobs Dobson would have in his gift were he to win.

At the end of last year Phillips, along with a number of other celebrities, was invited by the *Financial Times* to nominate his three books of the century. His first choice was nothing less than Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?* (1902), and the reasons he gave deserve to be quoted in full:

> Yes, of course he was wrong about Communism, but he was the most astonishing tactical genius in modern political history, turning a tiny irrelevant sect into the mightiest political organization ever seen. This is the most influential political book of the 20th century, a testament to the significance of the individual in history: it could teach New Labour a thing or two about organization.

And this is the voice of moderation—of one of the principal upholders of Blairism in the face of Livingstone's onslaught.

Probably Phillips doesn't stand convicted of anything worse than ignorance and insensitivity. It is unlikely that, given the chance, he would try to organize his own Cheka: like a great deal of New Labour rhetoric, his statement doesn't really mean what it says. It reveals something—something disquieting—about New Labour's instinctive preferences; but what it mostly confirms is how happy Blair and his henchmen are, bouncing around on a trampoline of meaningless slogans and empty phrases.

At the same time a great deal of Blairite rhetoric *does* get translated into reality. This is especially true in respect of the arts and culture in the narrower sense. The Blairite crusade to "modernize" cultural institutions continues unabated, and the latest major development is one of the most ominous yet.

In a world already well supplied with government agencies, we now have another, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Commission—MLAC for short. The chairman, Matthew Evans, has only just taken up his post; he has already given some idea of what we can expect, however, in a lecture which he delivered in January to a group of museum administrators.

Much of what he said was standard Blairite waffle about fresh perspectives and exciting new "knowledge management skills," but the note of warning was loud and clear. Museums, he announced, are "crying out for leadership and change." They are run by frightened creatures who are out of touch with the modern world, wrapped up in their narrow specializations,

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largely indifferent to the needs of the populace at large. And the proof of their failure is that fewer people go to museums than go to discos and pubs.

The remedy is equally clear. "What curators think is right is not a substitute for proper audience research." Nor can they be left to themselves: they need to be kept in line by "people from other backgrounds, including education, broadcasting, local governments and the media." Only when their elitism is curbed, in fact, can we ensure that "people and services come before collections," and that "access" takes precedence over preservation. And as one means of achieving access, works ought to be taken out of museums and exhibited in pubs, schools, and shops. (Matthew Evans is a publisher, incidentally—the chairman of T. S. Eliot's old firm Faber and Faber. Eliot's ghost must be giving a particularly thin smile.)

Not all Evans's recommendations are necessarily going to be implemented. It may be some time, even under the present government, before you find a Titian hanging in the average English pub. But neither can MLAC be dismissed as a mere propaganda-exercise. It was set up last year as a compromise, after the museums successfully fought off a plan to bring them under a single funding body (and hence under much greater government control). Its task is to advise Chris Smith, the Culture Secretary, on a "national strategy" for museums, and it seems fair to assume that at least some of its recommendations are going to be acted upon.

Nor have the advisers who drew up Chris Smith's original funding scheme simply gone away. Evans's lecture provoked some sharp protests. These were followed by comments in the press from "political sources" (otherwise unattributed, admittedly, but all too plausible), reminding museums that the government is the ultimate paymaster, and warning them that they would only make trouble for themselves if they didn't go along with its agenda on "social inclusiveness."

The irony is that in reality many museums are already pursuing populist or Blairite goals for all they are worth. Even the sedate Wallace Collection recently affirmed its solidarity with the wider public by electing Sir Elton John a trustee, for instance, and it now rents itself out for corporate entertaining (which I suppose is one form of social inclusiveness).

Or take the National Portrait Gallery. One of the most effective rebuttals of Matthew Evans came in the form of a letter from the chairman of the gallery's trustees. It was eloquently argued. But if you go into the gallery itself right now and look at the room containing its eight or nine most recent acquisitions, you will find modishness and Blairishness alive and well. They include a double portrait of Gilbert and George in the nude (with the world "Piss" written on it in large letters); a hideous portrait of the entrepreneur Richard Branson, flecked with what look like giant-sized drops of blood; a portrait of an eminent doctor who also just happens to be a leading Blairite, one of the first people he ennobled; and a group portrait of the mostly Marxist historians connected with the journal *Past and Present*, including Eric Hobsbawm and Christopher Hill. (Very few other British historians, living or dead, are currently to be seen on the Gallery's walls.) And no, Tony Blair isn't a Marxist, any more than his follower Trevor Phillips is really a Leninist. But he has gone out of his way to confer a rarely bestowed honor on Eric Hobsbawm—the Companionship of Honour, which is second only to the Order of Merit in intellectual prestige.

As for the broader question of public taste in the Blair era, the pious professions of a Matthew Evans or a Chris Smith only tell a small part of the story. I hope to grit my teeth and look at some of the realities in a future letter.

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Theater

Out of the humor business

by Mark Steyn

Merger mania is not confined to "new media." Geriatric media are also partial to it, though, in the case of the legitimate stage, it's less a sign of expansion and synergy than of remorseless shrinkage. Thirty years ago, the average New York theatergoer in search of a night out would have been able to choose between a Neil Simon, a Harold Pinter, a boulevard comedy, a gay comedy, a Broadway play, an off-Broadway play . . . Today, they're all still available, but only in the same show: *The Tale of the Allergist's Wife*, by Charles Busch, at the Manhattan Theatre Club. A Broadway matinée-lady-pleaser, by a fringe campmeister, at an establishment subscription house.

Busch is best known (if that's the phrase) as the author and transvestite star of *Vampire Lesbians of Sodom*, *The Lady in Question*, *Red Scare on Sunset*, and other artfully titled and maliciously observed cinematic parodies. In this instance, he appears to be donning the somewhat less gaudy garb of Wendy Wasserstein and making a leap for the mainstream. (As *New York Times* and *New Yorker* readers well know, Ms. Wasserstein has been absent from her keyboard of late, she and her vial of seed from some obliging friend having recently had a happy event, covered by the *Times* in tones of cooing wonder less developed cultures reserve for royal births.)

Fortunately, the leap from *Vampire Lesbians of Sodom* to the mainstream turns out to be the merest step. In *The Tale of the Allergist's Wife*, Busch has had the bright idea of saddling Neil Simon characters with Pinteresque and Beckettian crises. It's the kind of nifty premise we've become used to in what I like to think of as America's lunch-counter culture. You're impressed by the ingenuity behind the hazelnut-raspberry-cappucino and the Eurasian-milfoil-decaf-latte, but you can't help noticing that the more dazzling the range of flavors on display, the more everything comes out tasting the same. As *The Tale of the Allergist's Wife* begins, the eponymous heroine is slumped on the sofa, crippled by the burdens of life. She is a middle-aged Jewish mother, so we assume, naturally, that the burdens are the usual ones: the disappointing kids, the benignly indifferent husband. But, au contraire, Marjorie Taub is suffering from a rare disease, peculiar to Manhattan—or so she and the author, and the audience, and the critics, flatter themselves: a debilitating sense of inadequacy brought on by prolonged exposure to art. A rash of high culture has left her well covered in spots. Unlike her husband, Ira the allergist, Marjorie knows enough to know that *Waiting for Godot* isn't about "two guys stranded by the Tappan Zee Bridge," but she doesn't know enough to know what it is about—and the pain is unbearable. "Perdu!," she cries en français. "Utter damnation. The loss of my soul."

She's not done yet. "To quote Kafka, 'I am a cage in search of a bird,'" she declares.

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She is toying with a novel whose protagonists will include Plato and a nun in nineteenth-century Munich and which she sees as a riposte to Schopenhauer's treatise on *The World as Will and Idea*. "Must everything be an entertainment?," she wails. "If you want that, go to the circus, watch a plate-spinner."

That faint hum you hear in the background is, of course, the sound of plates being spun. Busch is unashamedly staking a claim as juggler to the gentry: the dinner service being casually bandied is high end —Beckett, Kafka, Plato, Schopenhauer, Rimbaud, Hesse—yet it's still vaudeville. But then the ability to keep the plates in the air is the great Broadway art: "Long as you keep 'em way off balance/ How can they spot you got no talents?," as the huckster sings in *Chicago*. Indeed, one of the first signs that Marjorie is out of whack is when she drops the china, during a breakdown at the Disney Store, which proves expensive. "Within three minutes you dropped six porcelain figures," Ira points out. "They tell me the Goofy alone was $250." Drowning in the dark depths of her despair, Marjorie has become a "retail terrorist," descending on the hapless Little Mermaid and sending her plunging to her doom.

At Broadway prices, we're all entitled to jeer at our less cultured fellows, and it's true those hundred-dollar figurines of animated children's characters are peculiarly apt emblems of the age. One's pleasure at the jest is only partially muted by an awareness that Busch's play falls into exactly the same category as those pricier Disney items: a cartoon in the form of art.

The Allergist's Wife is a smug piece of work but a cunning one. The Manhattan Theatre Club rings to the self-satisfied sound of knowing laughter, even if hardly anyone knows precisely what they're laughing at. For a theater audience, "Kafka" and "Plato" are the surefire yuk-prompters that "beer" is with a college crowd or "tampon" is at a women's comedy club, but with the important distinction that, unlike keggers and Aunt Flo, an intimate acquaintance with the subject under discussion is not necessary; the laugh of recognition does not depend on recognizing anything very much at all. You don't need to have read any Rimbaud or Schopenhauer, because after all the very mention of their names is hilarious. Much of the rest of the play is dependent on brand-name comedy, a comprehensive cataloguing of the familiar stops on life's trolley-car, at least for a certain type of Manhattanite (much of the laundry list will baffle non-New Yorkers): the 92nd Street Y, Zabar's, the Clinique counter at Saks, the Lenox Hill Thrift Shop. It is but the merest extension of the principle to turn Flaubert and García Márquez into equally fail-safe brand-name gags.

As in Beckett, Pinter, and the rest of the cryptic set, the energy of the drama is supplied by a mysterious figure whose arrival, impending or actual, triggers the various crises. In this case, it's Lee Green, formerly Lillian Greenbaum, a long-lost pal from the Bronx who shows up on Marjorie's doorstep. While Marjorie's been snoozing through worthy readings at the Y, Lee has led a fantastically glamorous life: she introduced Warhol to Campbell's Soup, dated Günter Grass, turned Princess Di on to landmines, accompanied the Nixons to China ("I didn't agree with them politically but I grew very fond of Pat"), etc. You get the idea. This exhaustive résumé so impresses Marjorie that she cheers up. But is Lee too good to be true—or real? Is she just a figment of the imagination? As with Godot, a large question mark hangs over her very existence. Unlike Godot, she's conjured in the fabulous flesh of Michele Lee, the perennially put-upon but perky Karen MacKenzie of TV's "Knots Landing." Miss Lee looks terrific and somehow manages simultaneously to project sunny surface banality plus teasingly ambiguous depths. After reanimating Marjorie's zest for life and easing the household tensions, Lee proceeds to wreak sexual havoc on the couple.

As Marjorie, Linda Lavin oomphs up

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Busch's not always dazzling one-liners into lethal missiles, fired with the faintest of inflections, the most unobtrusive of gestures, the pause held just a little longer than most actresses would dare. For close students of this sort of Upper West Sider, it's also a wonderful physical performance; watch the way, when she gets impatient with her fellows, she sucks her cheeks in. The director, Lynne Meadow, has a first-rate cast, all of whom deliver: Tony Roberts wryly underplaying Marjorie's husband; Anil Kumar as the Iraqi doorman he addresses as "kemo sabe"; Shirl Bernheim as the aging mother who keeps begging Marjorie to call Dr. Kevorkian. The laughs are wall-to-wall, but, before anyone pins that up on the marquee, let me hasten to add that I don't mean it as a compliment.

Unrelenting laughter is ultimately as self-defeating as a symphony with four fast movements, or a meal of five desserts, or a musical comedy with only hit songs. It's unnatural: it's not the rhythm of life. Unrelenting laughter comes at the expense of the show. It's the sound you hear when the author's got nothing to say. And what does Busch have to say? Well, in the second act, which plays as if the rewrites arrived during intermission, Marjorie wraps things up with a familiar Broadway homily: "We have traveled a mountainous road full of land mines, but we will endure. And you know why? You know *why*?," she demands. "Because love triumphs. Love, acceptance, faith, forgiveness . . . My little partisan army has all of that in abundance."

That's it? You buried us in a ton of heavyweight namedrops—Flaubert, Tolstoy, Kafka, and the rest of the gang—just for that? The decoration of the sentiment—the mountain, the mines—cannot disguise its threadbareness. But nor is it intended to. New York comedy is legit's answer to the World Wrestling Federation. The duelling rapier-like one-liners slash back and forth, but it's all phoney: no real battle is being waged. Marjorie's big thought is the equivalent of "But then I woke up and it was all a dream." Its purpose is to restore the status quo—as in a sitcom, where it's not logistically possible to advance the characters every week for five years, so instead Fred MacMurray says, "Remember, son, a man is never so tall as when he stoops to pick up another man's hat," and life goes back to the way it was at the beginning of the episode. Why would you leave your house to see a sitcom? Perhaps because the TV sitcoms don't have anyone your age on—everyone's twenty-five, working as a gofer, and living in palatial apartments, and if there's anyone middle-aged on the show he's an idiot and anyone old is a sex-fiend. Cultural dislocation starts earlier and earlier these days, and at least in the theater the sitcom comes customized—it talks about places you've been to in Manhattan; it makes references you understand; like a languid pool on a summer's day, it reflects your life back at you, with only the occasional ripple. Not all the details are strictly correct: unlike Marjorie, you don't read Flaubert or Kafka, but you go to plays where people mention Flaubert and Kafka, which is almost the same, and certainly smart enough to get by on. A theatrical mirror, unlike a fairground one, makes you look better.

The Tale of the Allergist's Wife is a triumph of attitude. There's no plot, no pain, no ideas, no characters. Not every funny play has to have a full set, but Wilde usually has something going on beneath the lines, and Coward exists on the surface but prods and tests it and manages to find hidden depths in the shallows. Here, all is attitude.

The word on the street is that Busch has turned in a gem. That all the faults I've adumbrated are, in fact, its virtues. That we have here a shoo-in for a Broadway transfer and the comic hit of the season. I don't think so. When the last laugh had died away and we traipsed out, you could hear the play fading even before we'd left the theatre. "Everything today seems so trifling," sighs Marjorie. Linda Lavin's performance is a full-throttle tour de force, but that line's the one that stays with you to the parking garage.

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From allergists to altruists, another fixture on the Manhattan landscape: at the Vineyard, Nicky Silver's latest play also leaves you pondering the enfeebled, parochial state of New York comedy. In *The Altruists*, the characters are a little younger, a little gayer, a little less moneyed, and a little less Jewish, but the jokes are more or less the same. As with *The Allergist's Wife*, the author is fortunate to have the services of a dandy comedienne, though Veanne Cox has a harder time than Linda Lavin in putting any spin on the material.

Instead of a desperately needy Jewish woman, we open with a desperately needy gay man—a stock character on the New York stage, but especially in the Silver oeuvre. Full of bright-eyed, clean-cut, gee-whizzery, Ronald (Joey Slotnick) had a privileged childhood and is trying to make up for it by doing good works and living in a cramped apartment. The previous night, he was fortunate enough to find the love of his life—Lance (Eddie Cahill): "You're beautiful! What do you weigh? Do you know?," he gushes. And, although he's a little taken aback to discover after the fact that young Lance is a rent-boy who expects to be remunerated for his professional services, he makes the best of it. "A wayward child! A lost soul! This is so exciting! I love a project!"

If you find Ronald's exclamations tiresome, get a load of his sister Sydney. Played by the skinny, angular, brisk Miss Cox in an electric pink pantsuit, this is a character who projects exclamation points in her body language. You can never be too rich or too thin, but Sydney is determined to test the theory to its limits. She plays the lead role in a soap opera called *Montana Beach* and, unlike those around her, is an avowed materialist. But right now she has an urgent problem. She's pumped three bullets into her boyfriend Ethan, in part because he sold her Louis XIV armoire to aid some obscure PC cause.

Needless to say, she's shot the wrong guy. Ethan (Sam Robards) shows up at Ronald's, hot from the bed of lesbian activist Cybil (Kali Rocha), who evidently is heavy on the activism, light on the lesbian. Ethan, a radical activist, goes back to his place, sees the body under the sheets, and assumes it's Sydney. The evening proceeds in Silver's preferred form, crosscutting between the apartments—the gay's, the actress's, the lesbian's—with slick choreography by David Warren. The author prefers monologues—arias even—to dialogue, and it's no coincidence that the play seems most at ease with itself when the various characters are in Sydney's bedroom, unleashing their volleys at the shrouded corpse in her bed.

Like Busch, Silver has a half-decent starting-point: these altruists care so much for humanity in general they're indifferent to humanity in particular. That's certainly a paradox worth noodling around: the late Princess of Wales, for example, was beloved by millions, but unable to hold any individual friends, all of whom eventually tired of her and gave up on her. (For a good comedy on *that* subject, invite a few friends round, cast one as Tina, one as Clive James, etc., and read out *The New Yorker* special commemorative issue.) But, having triumphantly produced the revelation that fellows who want to save the whale and help Africans are utterly indifferent to those around them, Silver then proceeds to do nothing but admire himself for his insight. Most of us will be familiar with his targets: anyone who's ever had the misfortune to have any dealings with government "social services" departments understands all too well that, generally speaking, social workers are the people most in need of a social worker. But the joke about the protester who reflexively demands "Free Nelson Mandela!" has been done before, and is surely a little past its sell-by date. I'm all in favor of beating up on pampered, parochial, New York knee-jerk liberals, but even they deserve better than this. If you're going to set up your characters as punching bags, you should make sure you can land a few punches. Silver's contention that all political commitment is selfish and shallow is undermined by his own shallowness, lack of

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commitment, and disinterest in humanity. As with Busch, there's no plot, no characters, *no point*—which is why both plays nose-dive into oblivion in the final moments. No one does shrill, neurotic intensity like Veanne Cox, but this so-called play is one long immature shriek. Like *The Allergist's Wife*, the play provides its own best critiques. As one of the altruists observes à propos some protest play or other, "I don't remember what it was about, or who was in it, just that it was absolutely unwatchable." Quite.

Sooner or later, any regular theatergoer in New York starts wondering: what's left? Musicals are gone, except for underpowered revivals like *Kiss Me, Kate*. Serious drama is gone, except for London imports. If New Yorkers can't do comedy, that's pretty much three strikes and out. Comedy of recognition is all well and good, but both these plays are so stunted in their horizons that their concerns and types are unrecognizable to anyone living forty-five minutes from Broadway. None of Silver's or Busch's characters has any life beyond their allotted time on stage: there's no sense of any past before the curtain went up, as there is with Hamlet, or Falstaff, or Rick in *Casablanca*; everybody's a stereotype based on the stereotype in the last play, one great Platonic Xerox machine that's almost out of toner. Perhaps the reason these people seem to lack a past is because playwrights like Silver don't seem to have any past themselves; they land on the New York stage and start writing about fastidious gays and hysterical actresses, and, if there are any plumbers or bankers or dairy farmers or Internet start-up entrepreneurs that ever cross their paths, clearly they don't inspire these authors to put pen to paper. There are all kinds of comedy—comedy born of disenchantment (Waugh's *Handful of Dust*), comedy of enchantment (Wodehouse)—but all good comedy is about the creation of a world which exists on its own terms. In pandering to an ever shrinking base with easier and easier laughs, Broadway and off-Broadway are putting themselves out of the humor business for good. If this is the best comedy New York producers can come up with, then the laugh's on them.

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Art

Tilman Riemenschneider at the Met

by Karen Wilkin

In *Form in Gothic*, his provocative meditation on the art and architecture of the late Middle Ages, the German art historian and aesthetician Wilhelm Worringer concluded that the world of Northern man "yielded itself to him in all acuteness with its thousand details and accidents." Worringer continued:

> It is this acuteness in the comprehension of actuality which differentiates Northern from Classical culture: the latter, avoiding the arbitrariness of actuality, builds itself up entirely on nature and her inner orderliness.

Yet while Northern man was transfixed by the intricacy and irregularity of the actual, he remained immune, according to Worringer, to its corporeal, material aspects. Classical culture may have sought "inner orderliness" rather than unpredictable complexity, but it still celebrated the physical: glorifying the body in its art, making the visible transfer of weight crucial to the aesthetic of its buildings, and endowing its deities, despite their superhuman powers and attributes, with many of the susceptibilities of ordinary mortals.

Classical culture, in short, was fundamentally sensuous; Northern culture was wholly anti-sensuous and therefore spiritual. Classical culture's natural means of expression was through mass, whether as illusion or in literal stone, while the Northern sensibility found its embodiment in what Worringer called "the ceaseless melody of Northern line." Gothic art, the art of the late Middle Ages, was, in Worringer's view, quintessentially Northern. It is an art of edges, weightless thrusts, and disembodied, convoluted rhythms, an art of multiplicity, irregularities, and details; Gothic art dissembles the physicality not only of its materials, but also of the things it refers to, especially when it depicts human beings. (I am oversimplifying, of course; a good deal of Worringer's argument has to do with the inherent contradictions of late Gothic architecture, among them its simultaneous acknowledgment and denial of the variety and attractions of the natural world.)

What drove to me to reread Worringer—after many years—was seeing the Metropolitan's scholarly extravaganza, "Tilman Riemenschneider: Master Sculptor of the Late Middle Ages,"[1] a fascinating, ambitious show that urgently recalls the distinctions posited by *Form in Gothic*. Worringer didn't discuss Riemenschneider—or anyone else—specifically in his extended exercise in know-

1 "Tilman Riemenschneider: Master Sculptor of the Late Middle Ages" opened at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, on February 7, 2000, and remains on view until May 14. The exhibition was previously seen at the National Gallery of Art, Washington (October 3, 1999–January 9, 2000). A catalog of the exhibition, edited by Julien Chapius, has been published by the National Gallery and the Metropolitan Museum, in association with the Yale University Press (352 pages, $65, $35 paper).

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ledgeable generalization, but he included one of his carvings among the illustrations and clearly took his work into account in his formulation of the character of Northern sculpture. It would be surprising if Worringer hadn't, since by the time he published *Form in Gothic*, in 1912, Riemenschneider had been "rediscovered" and acclaimed in Europe, especially in his native Germany, for almost a century. Germans still revere Riemenschneider, almost as they do his near-contemporary Albrecht Dürer, but he remains little known in this country, despite the considerable number of important examples of his work in American collections, including the Metropolitan's.

For anyone who has travelled through Germany in pursuit of Riemenschneider's sculpture, the Met's survey is a wonderful anthology, an impressive gathering of more than sixty of the Franconian master's sculptures, in wood and stone, polychrome and monochrome, assembled from museums, churches, and private collections in Europe and the United States. Most of the works are devotional, except for a truly bizarre chandelier of antlers, embellished with the torso of a fashionably dressed, mournful young woman holding a coat of arms. Not only does the exhibition document the artist's entire career, but it also reunites sculptures thought to have been made for the same ensembles, but long dispersed. *In situ* photographs of major works impossible to transport—most notably, the only two of Riemenschneider's immense sculptural altarpieces to have survived more or less intact—provide context for the exhibited fragments. Enriching the mix, works by some of the sculptor's contemporaries are strategically placed, offering viewers evidence of Riemenschneider's influences and sources, and helping to clarify the qualities that set him apart. These artists include the sculptors Veit Stoss, who seems to have been both colleague and competitor, and Niclaus Gerhaert von Leiden, the older artist from whom Riemenschneider seems to have learned the most, and the engraver Martin Schongauer, a crucial figure both for his own compositions, which served Riemenschneider as models, and for his role as a disseminator of Rogier van der Weyden's images, which influenced the sculptor profoundly. There's even a section on the nuts and bolts of a late Gothic sculptor's practice that examines techniques of carving in wood and stone, and addresses questions of finish with displays of tools and materials.

For anyone who hasn't done the Riemenschneider circuit, the Met's show is a splendid introduction to this powerful and puzzling artist—puzzling because no matter how dazzling the virtuoso carving or how familiar the Christian iconography, Riemenschneider's sculpture is difficult to come to terms with. His early works, such as the exhibition's charming alabaster *Annunciation* (c. 1485, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam) or an unidentified limewood female saint (c. 1490, North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh), are a curious amalgam of the volumetric and the bodyless. Poses seem unstable; the eye spirals around the figures, never finding a point of rest, but discovering dynamic profiles all along what Michael Baxandall calls the "arc of address" in his brilliant catalogue essay on perception.

Riemenschneider's carvings are essentially very high reliefs—they rarely have backs—yet they seem fully realized in the round, not dependent, as traditional reliefs are, on a single viewpoint to establish a convincing illusion of dimensionality. On the contrary, they are remarkably plastic, without, however, seeming to displace space; space, rather, seems to burrow into the volumes of Riemenschneider's forms, destabilizing and animating them. Masses of hair ravel into thick, coiling tendrils—think Botticelli—while the vast swoops of fabric that envelop the saints, angels, and apostles alike seem, strangely, to float at the same time that they sag under the weight of their cascading folds. Yet all this implied mass is expressed in terms of line and edge—think Botticelli again, who, according to Berenson, made linear rhythms the equivalent of the illusionistic bulk painted by his Florentine col-

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leagues. Implied mass or no, it's impossible to imagine bodies under Riemenschneider's extravagant swags of fabric. The monumental, coiled braids that weigh down the slender neck of the Raleigh museum's female saint possess more sculptural bulk than any other part of this lively, dynamically unbalanced little statue.

The more time we spend with these sculptures, the more complex and subtle they become. Nuances of carving and telling details of characterization announce themselves: the pleating of a shirt, the difference between the curls of a beard and long, twining locks, the wrinkles of an aging face. Some of the exhibited sculptures seem self-sufficient (especially to modern eyes with a taste for the fragment), while others are clearly orphans from a larger group. Some are formal, probably intended for public contemplation; others more tender and intimate. Some are miracles of refined finish, apparently meant to be studied up close (perhaps in private devotion); others, far rougher, are thought to have been workshop models. Yet somehow they all remain a little remote, inward-focused, and disturbing.

The Met has made great efforts to give visitors the most immediate experience possible of these disquieting works—which, to compound their inherent difficulty, have been wrenched from their context and, over the five centuries that separate us from their making, have often suffered dramatic physical changes. Given our distance from them—intellectually, historically, geographically, and perhaps even emotionally—we can only be grateful for the help that is offered. (That includes the lavishly illustrated catalogue with informative, eminently readable essays—well, except for one that preserves all too faithfully the qualities of scholarly German.) The sculptures are set at levels that correspond as closely as possible to their original locations, so that we see them from the viewpoint for which they were designed, no small consideration when the very proportions were influenced by the intended setting. Sculptures made to be installed up high, for example, often appear to have overly elongated torsos, wrenched postures, and overlarge heads when viewed from eye level. These "deformations," however, are not signs of an inept sculptor, but, quite the contrary, of one able to make canny adjustments to correct distortions inevitable when figures are viewed from below. The Met's elevated installation of many of Riemenschneider's sculptures restores the harmony of their proportions and gives us a more accurate sense of how they were meant to be seen. Consideration has been given, too, to the notion that the most skillful late medieval sculptors took into account the play of light in the locations for which their works were designed. Obviously, no artificial lighting system in a windowless gallery can ever come close to the subtly changing daylight of a central German church, but there seems to have been a deliberate effort to evoke the intimacy of natural light in the current exhibition, an effect very much enhanced by the merciful absence of display cases on most of the sculptures. (The light-responsiveness of Riemenschneider's deeply undercut, sharply defined surface articulations makes these decisions particularly significant.)

In some ways, of course, the most remarkable thing about the Met's Riemenschneider exhibition is that it happened at all. I don't mean only the curatorial challenges and practical difficulties of bringing together a large number of widely dispersed, five-hundred-year-old, fragile works, all cherished by their home institutions (some regarded as national treasures). I am certainly aware of what that entails, but I'm also thinking about the elusiveness of the exhibition's subject. The identification of an artist named Tilman Riemenschneider and of a body of work produced by him are ongoing tasks whose history is discussed in an absorbing catalogue essay, "A Shifting Critical Fortune," by Till-Holger Borchert. Riemenschneider scholarship began only in the nineteenth century, triggered by the

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accidental discovery of his tombstone in the course of carrying out roadworks near Würzburg cathedral in 1822, and for most of that century, the sculptor whose reputation today rests on his carved wooden altarpieces was thought to have worked exclusively in stone. Only gradually was his present oeuvre pieced together, raising many questions about the apparent inconsistencies of his efforts in different materials. Borchert outlines the complicated story of Riemenschneider's evolving reputation in terms of both art history and Germany's social and political history, correlating changing perceptions of the sculptor's importance and achievement with his compatriots' burgeoning sense of nationalism during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The "rediscovered" Riemenschneider became a kind of national hero, the subject of novels and poems, hailed as a paragon of *echt Deutsch* culture, proof of the existence of a German Renaissance independent of Italian influence. (That the Met's show is subtitled "Master Sculptor of the Late Middle Ages" indicates other attitudes among modern scholars.) The romantics claimed Riemenschneider and so did the National Socialists. There's even been an effort to claim him as a Lutheran (despite his lifelong work for the Catholic church and his burial in the Würzburg cathedral cemetery), as well as to glorify him as a model of right-thinking independence of mind, and a champion of the working man.

Riemenschneider's history, as it has been reconstructed, lends itself to all sorts of interpretations. Much of what is accepted seems based on extrapolation and conjecture. ("Tilman Riemenschneider" was apparently a common enough name that it is not certain whether certain documents refer to the sculptor or to someone else.) What seems agreed upon is that the artist's extraordinary ability was recognized soon after he qualified as a master and opened his workshop in Würzburg; commissions from places relatively far from his adopted city are proof of his fame and acclamation. The artist was honored in Würzburg as well, serving as town councilor and as mayor—which proved his downfall when the city unsuccessfully opposed the powerful Prince-Bishop Konrad von Thüngen, during the Peasants' Revolt of 1525. After Würzburg surrendered and begged forgiveness, Riemenschneider, as a member of the town council, was arrested, questioned, tortured, and briefly imprisoned. He lived another six years, but received no more commissions for important sculptures; only restoration work on altarpieces damaged during the revolt is documented.

Just who Riemenschneider was and just what constitutes a Riemenschneider sculpture remain delicate questions. A chronology has been established by surviving contracts, records of payment, church documents, and the like, but several works connected by clear documentation to Riemenschneider no longer exist, while many extant works have no documentation. Many have been irretrievably altered over the centuries: repainted or stripped, their surfaces forever changed. Many have been detached from their ensembles and dispersed. Then there's the issue of authenticity. In Riemenschneider's time, a master's role was to conceive a work, but not necessarily to execute it; execution, in a busy, successful workshop like his, involved the participation of assistants. Riemenschneider was not, after all, an artist who worked alone, making objects that expressed his unique individuality, according to modern conceptions, but a medieval craftsman whose sculptures were produced, during more than four decades, by a workshop with a changing population of apprentices, assistants, and journeymen. He was a maker of a product, of necessity attentive to the wishes of his clients and constrained by notions of appropriateness and acceptability. Images that proved successful were repeated in different materials and sizes. (At the Met, a group of related Madonna-and-child figures, in wood, provides vivid evidence of Riemenschneider's ability both to repeat and to vary images that met with approval.)

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Ultimately, it's all a matter of informed opinion, based on close, careful study of the works themselves. The catalogue offers a common sense reply to the thorny question of just what constitutes an "autograph" Riemenschneider: his Würzburg studio produced sculptures of notable excellence, in materials ranging from marble to limewood, for over forty years, and during that time the only constant presence was Riemenschneider himself, so we must conclude that he either closely supervised or was directly responsible for the execution of the works associated with him. Therefore, the reconstruction of Riemenschneider's oeuvre depends equally on connoisseurship, judgment, and painstaking research. This attitude informs the Met's exhibition, making it absorbing and challenging.

If we look hard, we can see how much Riemenschneider learned from Gerhaert von Leiden and how different his introspective, melancholy works are from Veit Stoss's more extroverted efforts. The pairing, early on, of a rather stiff, flat *Annunciation* by an anonymous Franconian with Riemenschneider's wind-swept group in alabaster is particularly revealing. We begin to see how some pieces seem merely workmanlike, while others seem positively inspired. We begin to see, too, how Riemenschneider himself evolved. The characteristic deep undercutting and enormous plasticity of his earlier work, the sense of disembodied volume created by edges, folds, and brittle loops of drawing, give way to less agitated forms and flatter conceptions. We can see, in a group of female saints of about 1510, how contained volumes, animated as much by the women's hip-shifted, swaying poses as by the rhythms of drapery folds, replace the extraordinary, fully realized spatial articulation of earlier works, such as Berlin's superb *Saint George* (1485–1490). Admittedly, *Saint George* is an unusually "sculptural" piece, even for early Riemenschneider, one whose bravura three-dimensionality is both notable and perplexing because it was intended to be installed not where it would be viewed from all sides, but in a niche. Still, it's a knockout, a complex play of solid and void, a delicately adjusted, slowly swirling progression, upward from the writhing dragon, trampled under the hooves of the robust, almost "classical" horse, rising through the slender, armor-clad rider with his narrow upraised sword.

The relative flattening of Riemenschneider's later work has been interpreted as his effort to de-emphasize the intense physical presence of his sculptures, an effort, perhaps, to enhance their spirituality, given the contemporary church dogma's concern about the thin line between works of art that inspired devotion and those that inspired idolatry. Yet throughout his evolution, it seems clear that Riemenschneider wished to make his sculptures as lifelike as possible. As we move through the show, we rapidly become aware of his many different ways of referring to hair—as luxuriant tresses and as tight curls, as flowing locks and as cropped beard. He differentiates, too, between young women with smooth, rounded faces and wrinkled old men with prominent bone structure; between the tapering fingers of the Virgin and the veiny, sinewy hands of the elderly Nicodemus.

This lifelikeness was, of course, often enhanced by polychromy. Many of Riemenschneider's sculptures, whether carved in stone or wood, were painted with naturalistic flesh tones and embellished with brilliantly colored and gilded garments. But there is also evidence that he was one of the first sculptors to embrace monochrome (which means neither a celebration of the appearance of wood nor total absence of color, since details were emphasized with touches of paint and the whole unified with modulating glazes). Since in Riemenschneider's day, sculptors were not often responsible for painting their works, and since in at least one instance, an important Riemenschneider altarpiece installed as a monochrome was later polychromed—by Veit Stoss—interesting questions arise about intent, the characteristics of works

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meant to be polychromed versus those intended for monochrome, and present-day perceptions of both. At the Met, well- and not-so-well-preserved painted sculptures, both by Riemenschneider and by his colleagues, are grouped together for comparison, to suggest what painted pieces might have looked like originally; labels and wall texts alert us to signs that suggest whether a sculpture was made to be painted or not, encourage us to look for traces of original color, and helpfully indicate the works that are now monochrome but have, in fact, been stripped. (Surprisingly, the intensely "sculptural" Saint George from Berlin was originally polychromed.) For anyone wanting more information, there's a fascinating catalogue essay, "The Surfaces of Riemenschnieder," by Michele Marincola that provides a fine summary of some of the aesthetic intricacies and technical problems.

As we move through the show, as we look more and more intently, the more questions these works provoke. Everything about Riemenschneider's sculptures appears to bear out Worringer's observations about Northern sensibilities and the Gothic: crispness, linearity, angularity, irregularity, and insistence on detail. A tiny *Adam* in pearwood (1495–1505, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna) is about as far from a classical ideal as you can get. He's not quite a "forked radish," but nothing about him suggests any wish to avoid "the arbitrariness of actuality" or to seek nature's "inner orderliness." Quite the opposite, *Adam* is a wiry, muscular, *naked* little figure, carefully observed and wholly uncontaminated by the idealizing filter of antique models. In Riemenschneider's figure groups—works such as the compressed lamentations or the Metropolitan's gnarled cluster of "helper saints"—something similar obtains; there's no sense of any underlying, organizing geometry in these compositions, but rather, as in the Netherlandish paintings that seem to have served the sculptor as models, via engravings, a wholly, empirical, casual "snapshot" approach to the image, at once anecdotal, weirdly frozen, and irreducibly Northern.

It comes as something of shock to realize that this quintessentially Gothic artist, this "Master Sculptor of the Late Middle Ages" lived from about 1460 to 1531, which makes him a contemporary not of Rogier van der Weyden—who died in 1464—but, improbably enough, of Leonardo da Vinci. (Riemenschneider was, in fact, eight years younger than Leonardo and outlived him by twelve years.) But though he was of the generation of the Italian High Renaissance, the Franconian sculptor's work is still essentially medieval. Würzburg wasn't Florence. Riemenschneider obviously looked hard at the world around him, fascinated by differences in physiognomies, by signs of age, and by changes in expression. But his curiosity about the "thousand details and accidents" of actuality was untempered by the Renaissance interest in the antique, and his figures demonstrate neither delight in the ability to represent the body nor delight in the body itself. A Gothic mistrust of the body pervades the exhibition. Riemenschneider's celebrated life-sized *Adam* and *Eve*, from the south portal of the Marienkapelle in Würzburg, are absent; they might have tipped the balance, since they are as close to sensuous as he gets. As it is, we are aware of a moody intensity and an aura of ferocious and fervent belief that, rather than making the sculptures more immediate to us, make us realize even more acutely how different their world is from ours.

It's not just that these work have been detached from their context, although the photos in the show and especially, in the catalogue, remind us of how much we are missing. One of Riemenschneider's great surviving monochrome altarpieces, for example, makes subtle allusions to the particulars of its setting by placing the carved figures of apostles against a pierced background that mimics, in miniature, the long, glazed lancets of the apse behind it. This transformation of actuality allows the viewer to move mentally into the space of im-

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age, to enter a parallel universe, both like and unlike his own, in which the sacred event takes place. The mystery becomes vivid and alive, but at the same time the abrupt material and scale differences between the real church and the plainly man-made altarpiece encourage detachment. Something similar occurs much later, in the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich, another quintessential northerner, who frequently depicted a tiny figure, facing away from the viewer, as a surrogate beholder, one who was able to enter into the fictive space of the painting.

"Tilman Riemenschneider: Master Sculptor of the Late Middle Ages" is, among other things, a salutary reminder of how untidily history and art history devolve. These late medieval works made in Germany, during what we call the High Renaissance in Italy, make it obvious that art history is not a progression of neatly defined events and movements that follow one another in an easily described sequence, but rather a messy series of fits, starts, doublings back, dead ends, detours, and unlikely coexistences. Hard as it is to fit Leonardo and Riemenschneider into the same timeline, the fact that their working lifetimes overlapped enlarges our understanding of the world. It makes things less predictable, more interesting, and richer, and makes the legacy of the Western tradition more compelling. It's what makes art history the endlessly fascinating, thought-provoking discipline it is.

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Art

Gallery chronicle

by Daniel Kunitz

At least since the rise of the Depression-era photographers, art photography, it seems, has drifted toward the vernacular, toward reportage. Contemporary galleries brim with work by younger photographers that is snapshot or news-photo derived. Surrealist photography remains one of the few non-vernacular photographic styles to find continued appreciation among the art-viewing public. But, it is still a delight to happen upon a show of an accomplished surrealist photographer who is not Man Ray. The Ubu Gallery recently brought together works by the Czech surrealist Frantisek Vobecky, displaying them within the context of the Czech avant-garde, which in this case means an informative smattering of drawings, an oil, and photomontages by such contemporaries of Vobecky as Jindrich Styrsky, Vaclav Zykmund, and Karel Teige.[1]

A tailor by trade, Vobecky (1902–1991) studied drawing in Prague and painting in Paris before buying his first camera in 1928. Initially he thought of the camera as a means of documenting his paintings, but by 1935, under the spell of the powerful versions of surrealism flourishing in Czechoslovakia in the Thirties, he began making his first photomontages—essentially photographs of assembled or collaged elements. All of Vobecky's images at Ubu were black-and-white prints, and all evince a thorough, albeit narrowly conceived, absorption of the surrealist idiom. His technique involved pasting together in a "montage" various images from magazines, forms cut from his own photographs, drawings and the like, and then making a print of the whole collage. Most of the individual images in the photomontages are assembled against a familiar background: clouds in the sky, grained wood, a street, foam and water at a beach.

Like others working in the surrealist vein, Vobecky appears to have been interested primarily in eroticism (though less explicitly than his Parisian confrères) and the workings of the unconscious. Those of us who speak no Czech probably miss out on much of the wit in these images, but enough comes through visually to cause a chuckle in linguistically disadvantaged viewers. For instance, *A Discovery in a Somber Landscape* (1936) depicts a medallion-shaped image of a woman inset onto a linen napkin crossed by a silver knife. On the left are pasted images of, presumably, female flesh cut into biomorphic shapes. All these images rest on a photograph of a rocky landscape below a stretch of sky. Despite the fact that there may be puns on the Czech words for, say, knife or napkin, we can, nevertheless, appreciate the whimsy behind the conjunction of the clothed woman in the medallion and her nude apparition in the landscape of the artist's mind.

1 "Frantisek Vobecky: Photomontages 1935–1938" was on view at Ubu Gallery, New York, from January 8–February 26, 2000.

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Indeed, the effectiveness of a given surrealist work frequently lies in how well it overcomes pretentiously majuscule symbolism with wit. Vobecky, lighthearted in his conjuring of nudes, pieces of silverware, male profiles, swathes of fabric, and other items floating on wispy skies or tree-strewn landscapes, usually manages to avoid overbearing and obvious effects. Only in *Meteor* (1936), which places a child below an abstract, geode-like cutout, does the artist seem to be striving for significance. On the contrary, works like *After the Low Tide* (1936) and *A Melancholic Day* (1936) manage to juxtapose elements in subtle, intriguingly mysterious ways. In *After the Low Tide*, one of the show's funniest and more beguiling photomontages, a nude female torso horizontally occupies the bottom quarter of the frame; above it sits a fabric-covered stool with a large silver teaspoon jutting out diagonally. An eye resting in the spoon gazes down on the woman's torso, oblivious to the sexually charged sea foam behind it. While the entire piece is held together in a balanced composition, the discrete elements function like a subconscious comic-strip panel.

Pieces in the gallery's back room by the other Czech avant-gardists made this an especially comprehensive exhibition. Karel Teige's three photomontages provided a useful counterpoint to Vobecky's. Energetic and at times colorful, Teige's work tends to play it safe: rather than using ambiguously abstract cut-outs, he sticks to recognizable imagery. At first glance, Jindrich Styrsky's drawings seemed typical examples of the surrealist parlor game *Exquisite Corpse*, but on closer inspection they revealed no fold marks—he must have played the game in his head. Finally, none of these other Czech artists managed to usurp Vobecky's rightful place at center stage. Perhaps it takes years of practice with a tailor's scissors to master the eccentric idiom of surrealist montage.

The exhibition "Pasted Pictures: Collage and Abstraction in the 20th Century"[2] alluded to Clement Greenberg's seminal essay "The Pasted-Paper Revolution," in which the critic described the origins of cubist collage—and collage in general—as a response to cubism's increasing abstraction. E. A. Carmean, Jr., who wrote the catalogue essay for this especially engaging and informative show, agrees with Greenberg (who was appropriately tentative in his assertion) when he claimed that it was Georges Braque who made the first collage in September of 1912. However, this bit of lore has not yet hardened into art historical fact: the *Oxford Dictionary of 20th Century Art*, for instance, attributes the invention of collage to Picasso, with Braque following soon after. In either case, the show at Knoedler began by pairing a Picasso, *Pipe and Wineglass* (1914), with a Jasper Johns, *Sketch for Cup 2/Cups 4 Picasso* (1971–72). The absence of a Braque collage was the only lacuna in this otherwise wide-ranging exhibition.

The astute pairing of the Picasso and the Johns allowed the viewer to follow the evolution of collage from, as Greenberg put it in his revised version of the essay, a way of "obtaining *sculptural* results by strictly nonsculptural means" to the less technically heuristic mode of assemblage. Picasso, in *Pipe and Wineglass*, drew on a cut-and-pasted piece of brown paper in order to create a sort of trompe l'oeil wineglass. It simultaneously occupies both the literal surface of the work and a slightly deeper, though still shallow, depicted plane, thereby finding an ingenious two-dimensional equivalent for a three-dimensional glass. Johns, in his piece, plays on the wineglass device by using a cut-out profile of Picasso's face to form the edge of a glass. Still, what is notable about the Johns is that for him collage no longer serves as a means of finding new modes of depiction; his *Sketch* is simply a group of assembled and collaged elements brought together to form an essentially decorative, and witty, work.

This development, from collage as a

2 "Pasted Pictures: Collage and Abstraction in the 20th Century" was on view at Knoedler & Company, New York, from February 3–March 11, 2000.

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means of discovery (which, as Greenberg himself noted, in no way detracts from its decorative function) to collage as an end in itself, was evident throughout the show. In fact, one might indicate the moment when artists stop drawing on the collaged elements as the point at which the pasted-paper revolution settled into the regime of abstract assemblage. For Juan Gris, represented here by *The Coffee Mill* (1916), collage was still an extension of drawing, or a means of extending two-dimensionality. It was Jean (Hans) Arp who made the first entirely abstract collage, though his two works in this exhibition date from much later in his career. Arp's *Pieces to Be Arranged According to the Laws of Chance* (c. 1960–66), an almost meditatively serene abstraction, unites twenty paramecium-like shapes randomly; while his *Untitled* (1960) plays more with optical effects by pairing two similarly shaped archipeligoes of torn paper—one blue, the other yellow, both on a green ground—suggesting mirror images.

Of course, much recent collage and contemporary assemblage derives from the work of the Dadaist master of the genre, Kurt Schwitters, so it's not surprising that Knoedler included five of his pieces. Schwitters's accomplishments in the form extend from the humorous, *Wantee's Hair* (1947), to the rambunctious, *Don't Vote* (1947), to more decorative pieces such as *Sicilien Mz 26.39* (1926), which looks almost like an abstract painting and is fundamentally about tonal variation and composition. This show implicitly made the argument that Robert Motherwell (represented by four works) is heir to Schwitters's collaging genius, an argument not entirely borne out by the evidence. Where Schwitters was oblique, challenging, and witty, Motherwell is broad, employing large formats and obvious statements. For example, Motherwell tends to put the primary element—a Régie ad in *The Tearingness of Collaging* (1957), itself a rather coddling title, and a Winsor & Newton box in *Winsor Collage* (1962–63)—squarely in the center of his compositions, whereas Schwitters slyly places the primary elements in his compositions off toward the edges.

One route taken by followers of Schwitters leads inevitably to neo-Dadaist assemblages like Robert Rauschenberg's *Untitled* (1980), a construction of two pairs of shorts pasted on a gound of collaged images. Less expected were Ad Reinhardt's fantastic, abstract explorations of color in *Untitled* (1940) and *Collage* (1937)—both masterly compositions of overlapping colored rectilinear shapes—and Judith Rothschild's vigorous efforts. Space prohibits enumerating all of the excellent works to be found in this show. Suffice it to say that, with a few exceptions—Cy Twombly's aggressively banal ten-second scribblings chief among them—every piece here repaid serious viewing and repeated visits.

The first show in over twenty years to focus exclusively on the artist's drawings, "Marsden Hartley: Drawings"[3] extracts a certain stylistic consistency from this restless artist's career, far more than one discerns in his paintings. That said, Hartley's consistency as a draftsman in no way precludes variation among individual drawings, resulting from his development and his continued encounters with the work of other artists.

Hartley led a peripatetic existence—it has been said that he never lived in one residence for longer than ten months—and the show reflects that wanderlust. His earliest surviving drawings date from the winter of 1908–09, when Hartley occupied a little farmhouse in North Lovell, Maine. Rendered with an excited, anxious, jumpy hand, these drawings make it easy to see why the artist responded strongly to German expressionism a few years later. *Two Men Felling Trees* (1908–09) and *Man Felling Tree* (1908–09), both crayon sketches on paper,

3 "Marsden Hartley: Drawings" was seen at Kraushaar Galleries, New York, from February 11–March 11, 2000. It is on view at the Heckscher Museum of Art, Huntington, New York, from March 21–May 28, 2000.

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describe the energy of sawing loggers in small brusque marks that frequently cross the figures' contour lines. In the most striking of these early works, *Seated Man and Sketch of Hand* (1908–09), the line becomes long and wobbly, not unlike that of, say, Oskar Kokoschka. Remarkably expressive, the drawing evokes the sitter's quiet sadness, the despair in his face and slumped posture.

After making these sketches, Hartley apparently didn't do much drawing for almost twenty years, during which time he traveled in Europe, encountering the work of Matisse, Picasso, and other artists of the schools of Paris and Germany. When he resumed drawing, his line initially took on a calligraphic delicacy. Elegant and serene, *Landscape with Hills and Trees* (c. 1927) deploys thick pencil marks, rubbed for shading. According to the instructive catalogue essay by Bruce Robertson, in this drawing Hartley "suavely plays with the perspective and hatching devices of Cézanne, merging and overlapping the profile of the hills with branches." While the influence of Cézanne is evident, it is not fully assimilated. In still lifes like *Peppers* (1927) and *Fruit on a Plate* (date unknown), Hartley, using linear shading, seems more concerned with volume than with two-dimensional planes and facets.

Partly due to the Depression, Hartley returned to the United States from Europe in 1930. He spent the following summer in what was then the art colony of Gloucester, Massachusetts, observing the boulders of Dogtown, an uninhabited area on the outskirts of town. Of these rocks Hartley wrote:

> The place is forsaken and majestically lovely as if nature had at last formed one spot where she can live for herself alone . . . a cross between Easter Island and Stonehenge—essentially druidic in its appearance.

In an effective compositional reversal, Hartley foregrounds the massive boulders of *Rocks and Spires* (1931), using crosshatching and rubbed black crayon to contrast the weight of the rocks with the distant, needlelike spires. Switching media and technique, he employs ink for delicate though energetic linear shading in *Dogtown Common #4* (1931). Unmarked white stretches of board in this work cause space to recede, making the boulders flatter, less heavy and projecting. Hartley's enduring attraction to monumentality extends to other landscapes, such as the upwardly striving, craggy peaks of *Waxenstein, Garmisch-Partenkirchen* (1933) that loom over the diminutive house at the bottom left of the composition. The hulking presence of boulders and mountain peaks that dominate the landscapes finds a counterpart in the two massed figure studies on view, *Three Men Standing Behind Two Seated Women with Aprons* (c. 1943) and *Five Figures—One in Military Uniform* (date unknown).

In the catalogue, Robertson argues for the importance of the undoubtedly powerful drawings in the Dogtown series. But the figure studies, even the more schematic and iconic groups of figures from the end of Hartley's career, manage an emotional depth that is difficult to attain in bare landscapes. Still, Hartley's distinct, excitable nature is manifest in all the works on view.

If you know the work of the English painter Christopher Richard Wynne Nevinson (1889–1946) at all, it is probably for his images of World War I, which gained him early fame. After the war, Nevinson's reputation went into a long decline, largely because he renounced his youthful avant-garde style and began painting in a traditional realist manner. While it is unlikely that the sweeping retrospective "C. R. W. Nevinson: The Twentieth Century" (his first in the United States) on view at the Yale Center for British Art will vault Nevinson into the first rank of modern painters, it should win him the broader recognition he deserves.[4]

4 "C. R. W. Nevinson: The Twentieth Century" is on view at the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, from February 25–May 7, 2000.

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While he was a student at the Slade School, Nevinson's contemporaries included Stanley Spencer, David Bomberg, and the Vorticist Edward Wadsworth. From London, he moved to Paris where, instead of meeting the French, Nevinson fell in with the Italians. He shared a studio with Modigliani and met the Italian futurists Gino Severini and F. T. Marinetti. Eventually he returned to Britain, collaborated with Marinetti in writing *Vital English Art: A Futurist Manifesto*, thereby becoming the most widely known English proponent of futurism. The earliest works on view, from the period 1911 to 1913, alternate between competent realism and latter-day impressionism, though at least one work from his time in Paris, *Le Vieux Port* (c. 1910), evinces a strong cubist influence. Around 1913, Nevinson's style developed into a blend of cubism and futurism—notably in *Dance Hall Scene* (c. 1913), a riotous swirl of color and angular revelers—though one senses that he was always an uneasy convert to the avant-garde. He never pushes his imagery into abstraction, and throughout his life he remained enthralled both to deep perspective and modeling. The prewar years culminate in *The Arrival* (1914), the title of which Nevinson changed a year later to *My Arrival in Dunkirk*, in a successful bid for publicity. A futurist mélange, *Arrival* depicts a huge steamship around which a number of elements revolve; its cubist planar faceting rhymes appropriately with the angles of the steamer's prow. At the time, one reviewer complained that "[i]t resembles a Channel steamer after a violent collision with a pier." Nevinson explained that it represents a "state of simultaneous mind."

The futurists celebrated modernity, technology, and warfare, so the onset of the First World War found Nevinson's style perfectly adapted to the subject. At first, he went to the front as an ambulance driver and later returned as an official war artist, making pictures for the government. Nevinson excelled as a painter of warfare, seizing on the speed of soldiers rushing back to the trenches, the kaleidoscopic burst of light from an exploding shell, the columns of men on the march, their exhaustion after a battle, and the agonies of men dying. In *Motor Lorries* (1916), he distorted the length of laborers' arms, as if the weight of their burdens were stretching their limbs, transforming them into gray beasts. Throughout these canvases, Nevinson's modernist angularity serves him especially well: it allows him to trace the fractured lineaments of rubble in *Ypres after the First Bombardment* (1915) and *Boesinghe Farm* (1916); to explore bayonet thrusts in *Marching Men* (1916); to define the uniforms of anonymous regiments in *Night Arrivals* (1915); and to highlight the cold menace of a machine gun in *La Mitrailleuse* (1915). Upon returning to the front as an official war artist, Nevinson began painting in a more traditional, realist mode. Ironically, the ministry of information expressed disappointment in this work, finding that it lacked Nevinson's "savage self"—they too had valued the propagandistic uses of his avant-garde style.

After the war, Nevinson for the most part put both futurism and cubism behind him. Inhabiting an eclectic assortment of styles ranging from straight realism to realism inflected by impressionism and futurism, he painted cityscapes of London and New York, a striking *Aerial View* (1919–20) from a biplane over Paris, as well as leisure scenes—crowds in a café, suburban picnickers. There are some excellent pictures from his postwar period, but it's hard not to share the feeling that he lost a crucial intensity when he gave up modernist experimentation. Toward the end of his life, Nevinson attempted to revisit his successful wartime style in a series of allegorical paintings that announce the artist's fears of approaching fascism. In *The Twentieth Century* (1932–35), a colossal Thinker sits before skyscrapers, surrounded by throngs of bayonet-wielding soldiers, cannons, and girders. Sadly, his old intensity had calcified into a bloodless manner, and these stilted works must be judged failures.

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Music

Barenboim at Carnegie Hall

by Jay Nordlinger

Musicians aren't ranked like tennis players. But if they were, Daniel Barenboim would rank . . . in the top five? Top ten? Let's say top ten, just to be on the safe side. Whatever the number, he is one of the outstanding musicians in the world today. Both a pianist and a conductor, he has been a fixture among us for some forty years now. He is a tremendously versatile musician, at home in the keyboard works of Bach and in the pit of Bayreuth. This is no common thing. About the only thing Barenboim does not do is compose. In this respect, André Previn, another pianist and conductor, may have a leg up on him. Indeed, it's somewhat surprising that Barenboim has not (that we know of) put pen to paper, so thoroughly musical is he. He did study with Nadia Boulanger, teacher of just about everybody in twentieth-century composition. Perhaps it didn't take.

Barenboim, born in 1942, is celebrating this year the fiftieth anniversary of his debut, at the age of seven, in his native Buenos Aires. His mother was his first teacher; his father was his second. He would have no other, formally. When the boy was ten, the family moved to Israel. Barenboim eventually came under the influence of Arthur Rubinstein, whose playing, even now, is stamped all over Barenboim's own. In his twenties, Barenboim was seemingly everywhere: playing Beethoven concertos with Otto Klemperer, conducting the English Chamber Orchestra, and, most memorably, playing chamber music—with his wife, the late Jacqueline du Pré, and Itzhak Perlman, and Pinchas Zukerman, and Zubin Mehta, and the rest of that golden crowd. He seemed to represent, more than any of them, the high energy of youth. He has not lost an iota.

It is for his conducting, more than for his piano playing, that he is increasingly known today. And for good reason. He commands one of the greatest orchestras in the world, the Chicago Symphony. In 1991—after almost fifteen years of leading the Orchestre de Paris—he got the call from Chicago to replace the beloved George Solti. In the first years, there was some grumbling around town that the orchestra was perhaps not the marvel it had been under the old man. In fact, it wasn't: it was far more marvelous. Only nostalgia, obstinacy, or ignorance kept Chicagoans from knowing this. The city is, by all accounts, more comfortable with its whippersnapper of a conductor now (even at fifty-seven, conductors are whippersnappers). High time.

Lately, Barenboim has been a steady presence in New York, engaged in a *Perspectives* series at Carnegie Hall. The Hall has been doing this lately, with some of the heavy hitters in music (Pierre Boulez, Maurizio Pollini). Over this and the next season, Barenboim will appear in a variety of his guises: soloist, conductor, chamber musician, teacher, lecturer. He happens to be one of the most fluent talkers in all of music.

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Few are the musicians who can communicate, verbally, what they know and do. James Levine is one; Barenboim is another. One of Barenboim's evenings in March was a conversation about music with the critic and Middle East opinionist Edward Said. Barenboim shares the professor's politics—but that is a subject for another article.

Barenboim launched his series on January 30, with a recital alongside Plácido Domingo. This was, believe it or not, the tenor's New York recital debut, after about thirty years of being on top of the operatic heap. Barenboim, that afternoon, played two solo pieces, or rather, showpieces: the Concerto Paraphrase on *Rigoletto* by Liszt and a section from *Iberia* by Albéniz. Barenboim is an ebullient, swashbuckling, somewhat old-fashioned pianist. Like his model, Rubinstein, he boasts a big, fat tone, unapologetic in its fullness and grandeur. You wouldn't think he had a lot of time for practice, what with his conducting responsibilities, but he retains rivers of technique. His arpeggios, for example, were rippling and unerring. His only fault, really, was a tendency to pounce on certain notes, distorting the musical line. This is a habit that Barenboim has always had to fight, often without success.

In the first week of March, Barenboim and his Chicago forces performed at Carnegie on three consecutive days. The first concert began with Mozart's Concerto No. 25 in C Major, K. 503, with the conductor at the keyboard. Oh, dear: why do they always do this? They do it, mainly, out of ego. There is little musical benefit to it; there is mainly musical harm. Murray Perahia, a leading Mozartean, recorded all of the Mozart concertos this way, and so did Barenboim, before him. Neither set of recordings is the better for it. It's a stunt, really—not the worst stunt in the world, but a stunt nonetheless. Playing and conducting are separate activities, and to do them together is inevitably to slight them both. Worst of all, Barenboim will play and conduct all of the *Beethoven* concertos—almost unheard of—next fall, as the series continues. We all know he's a wonder. He doesn't need to do this—to Beethoven, for one.

The Mozart C Major was bold and grand, in true Barenboim style. This was the antithesis of dainty, drawing-room Mozart. The pianist displayed his big, fat tone, and his phrasing was lovely. He conducted whenever he had a hand available—that is, even while he was playing with the other—and he conducted, too, with his playing—that is, he executed the keyboard part in such a way as to lead others. A nudge here, a nudge there, and pretty soon the musical line is out of whack. Refinement suffers, as well. When you conduct, you simply do things at the keyboard that you wouldn't do otherwise. Barenboim overpedaled in spots, and he missed some notes needlessly (another hazard of the stunt, to continue to harp). As usual, certain notes were strangely, and wrongly, accented. He used a generous amount of rubato, or license in tempo, but did not quite go out of bounds. His cadenza was dashing, virtuosic, and fun.

Barenboim was at his least musical in the Andante. Quite simply, he pounded, and made a truly ugly sound. He lost his singing tone whenever he rose to the level of forte (a difference between him and Rubinstein). In certain passages, he jabbed violently at the keyboard; in others, he played richly, beautifully, deep into the keys. Also, he projected this movement line by line, rather than as a whole. The entire thing was disjointed and unbeautiful. The Finale, however, was more successful: jaunty, nicely arched, and rhythmically arresting. For all its problems, this was commendable Mozart—an athletic and muscular reading. Barenboim is a lion of a pianist, even in Mozart. There's room for such men.

The second half of the concert saw Barenboim as conductor, only. He puts on an impressive show. He strides onto the stage with lavish confidence, as befits someone who fairly rules music. He has the bearing, and panache, of Napoleon (we might imagine). The work that evening was

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the Symphony No. 4 of Bruckner, "The Romantic"—a huge, sprawling piece, right up Barenboim's alley. Bruckner conducting requires, above all, a sense of pacing, an understanding of the vast architecture of this unusual music. This, Barenboim has. He held the piece—which can easily overwhelm even a good conductor—in the palm of his hand. He communicated effortlessly to the orchestra; every gesture, every movement, every glance, was musical. He is one of those conductors who seem to enact their interpretation on the podium, though not self-consciously or obtrusively. Another imperative of Bruckner conducting is not—ever—to allow the music to get sluggish. Again, Barenboim took care of this. He guided his Chicago machine surely. The strings, which usually play second fiddle to the famed Chicago brass, were exemplary. The big brass chorales, too, were glorious and powerful—always on the verge of blaring, of course (this is a Chicago weakness), but just pulling back.

In the second movement, the Andante, the music always breathed, with Barenboim showing a sense of dance. Rhythm, phrasing, dynamics—all were sheerly musical. The conducting was tight where it should have been tight, and more free where it should have been that. The Scherzo was laid out in great blocks of sound, and afforded the space it requires. Barenboim drove the piece metronomically in spots, to thrilling effect. Though it's easy to make this piece appear fragmented, Barenboim did not. Nor did it seem repetitive, which is really astonishing. There was enough tempo variation, enough dynamic variation, enough alteration of sensibility—in short, enough musical sense. What to do simply came to Barenboim—not everything in this field is forethought—as to every true musician.

The Finale had another important Brucknerian quality: it was suspenseful without being urgent or hurried. It was convincing line by line, but the entire work—not just the movement, but the whole work, from minute one to minute seventy (or whatever)—was in mind. The unison playing of the orchestra was superb. The entire symphony was held on the point of the conductor's baton, and before the evening was over it was clear that Barenboim is one of the great Brucknerians of our time.

The following afternoon began with a curiosity: a one-act opera called *What Next?* by Elliott Carter, commissioned by Barenboim two years ago, when the composer was ninety. The opera—Carter's first!—is a complicated affair, with a gross amount of percussion, including everything but the kitchen sink. The piece requires a cool, confident leader—a manager—which, in Barenboim, it had. He cued like a madman and succeeded in unifying players, singers, and music. He makes a strong advocate for this work, as he does for all contemporary music. The performance carried his vivacity and conviction all the way through. The score is dense and tricky, but Barenboim achieved clarity in it; the denser the score, of course, the greater the need for clarity. Most touchingly, the composer himself was on hand, spry and appreciative. He was born during the administration of Theodore Roosevelt. His maiden opera may not enter the permanent repertory, but it is an admirable work, and it represents Elliott Carter's defiance of and triumph over decay.

Next came Manuel de Falla's ballet *The Three-Cornered Hat*. Barenboim, given his boyhood in Argentina, might be expected to be particularly idiomatic in Spanish music, and he is, somewhat—but no more so, really, than in other types of music. He captured nicely the pomp and majesty of this music; less well, its tenderness. This was grand-scaled Falla, featuring great, even startling, eruptions of sound. The technical precision and energy of the performance were astounding. Even so, certain of the dances could have used a little more suavity, a little more slinkiness, more lightness and grace. So too, there might have been a little more Spanish plaintiveness, a bit more of the wail. The concluding *Jota*, to be sure, was exhilarating, with its relentless pulse and bone-jarring volume—as much Bruck-

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ner as Falla. And why not? Falla with a Brucknerian wallop is a fair idea, once you've experienced it.

The last of the three concerts opened with a work by another versatile musician—the composer and conductor Pierre Boulez. He's now in his mid-seventies and undertaking a *Perspectives* celebration of his own. Boulez wrote his *Notations* for piano when he was a student under Olivier Messiaen. Many years later—partly at the prodding of Barenboim—he orchestrated these humble studies, giving us the *Notations for Orchestra*. Barenboim's programming of such music is dutiful, but his heart is in it, too. Ultimately, these pieces can't help having the feeling of student exercises, even if grandly dressed up, and magnificently played. Barenboim did what he could to fish out of the *Notations* whatever music they contain. The last one played—*Très vif. Strident*—has a jauntiness, a chopping, ragged, insistent quality. Barenboim drew from it every drop of pleasure to be had, acting as a sort of jazzman. Then, he had the orchestra play it again—a true "encore." Yet this was a forced one, imposed on an audience whose applause, in fact, had been petering out.

The final work of the Chicagoans' visit was Mahler's Symphony No. 5, a staple of ambitious and skillful conductors for several generations now. Solti, a bull moose of a maestro, bade farewell to Chicago with it. Barenboim was gutsy, in a way, to take it on. This was not, however, his finest outing. The opening funeral march was rather limp and blunt, without much sorrow or inwardness. Barenboim frequently gave too much sound (though not as much as the unsurpassable Solti). Strangely, there was little intensity here; it was all too relaxed, even indifferent—not normally a Barenboim failing. Barenboim could have used a thinner, more transparent sound, less lush and round. His reading was often boisterous and extrovert, as you'd expect, but it lacked psychological involvement, the delirium—or at least anxiety—that Mahler demands.

The Adagietto—one of music's most beloved stretches—is a keen test of a conductor's ability. Barenboim gave it a workable tempo, not too slow. Yet this was hardly a delicate or ethereal account; it was rather earthbound and solid—an undreamy Adagietto from an undreamy conductor. It did not cast the spell that it might have, but neither was it sentimental or syrupy, which was a relief. Also, it concluded with a world-class diminuendo, an achievement worth sighing over.

In the Rondo-Finale, Barenboim and his men at last hit their stride. This movement was clear and well weighted, revitalizing and bright. There were a few lapses of ensembleship—surprising from this bunch—but nothing ruinous. Barenboim reveled in this music, rejoicing in the happiness that Mahler affords us—he can be so stingy with it—in the end. In every measure, the conductor knew what he was doing. Of course, this is a more straightforward, more self-sustaining movement than the preceding ones, offering little room for rumination and subjectivity. The close, by the way, was maybe the fastest on record—Barenboim was in no mood to savor these measures—but it was accurate, and, for most listeners, exhilarating.

Danny B., as he is known in some circles, has few rivals among conductors. For that matter, he doesn't have all that many rivals among pianists. He is still a youngish man—especially, again, by the standards of conductors—but he has already enjoyed a very lengthy, enormously fruitful career. How many years does he have left? By the standards of Elliott Carter, a great many—more, in fact, than Franz Schubert had total. By the time Barenboim is through, he will have performed and recorded everything, or practically so. He will presumably grow in wisdom and power. And who knows? Given his talents, he may spring a symphony—or, to begin with, a piano prelude—on us someday. No one would be shocked. He is one of the most impressive musicians we have ever had the privilege of knowing, observing, and following.

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Concert note

Ignat Solzhenitsyn
with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra,
Daniele Gatti, conductor,
at Avery Fisher Hall, New York.

It's a striking name—thrilling, in a way—on a concert program: Solzhenitsyn. What's it doing there? Well, the great man has three sons, the middle of whom, Ignat, is a pianist. It is right and just, somehow, that he is an excellent one.

Earlier this year, Ignat Solzhenitsyn, who is twenty-seven years old, toured the United States with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under its music director, Daniele Gatti. Gatti himself is a worldwide sensation; now thirty-seven, he is thought to be the great hope of his generation for conducting. It was Solzhenitsyn, however, who made the more encouraging impression at their concert in New York on February 6.

The concerto was the A major of Mozart, K. 488—a worthy test for any pianist. This is a piece that requires intelligence, taste, and musicianship. From the beginning, Solzhenitsyn was in command. His playing was straightforward, correct, and characterful—in a word, Mozartean. His runs were clean, with a sheen to them. He displayed a sure sense of the musical line. He used a sensible amount of rubato—not so much as to distract or obtrude, enough to lend a freedom. Right and left hands engaged in a sprightly, controlled conversation. The octaves were resonant and bold, without falling into (inappropriate) bravura. The quick passagework was limpid and unusually musical; the pianist was not doing nothing here; this was not merely filler; rather, it was all part of the musical whole. Solzhenitsyn showed his greatest individuality in the cadenza—Mozart's own—which had a feeling of spontaneity, familiar as it was.

The second movement, the Adagio, was a little gem of an arietta. Tempos were well judged, and the playing was noble, modest, and aristocratic. Every accent, every stress, was correct. The pulse was always there; Solzhenitsyn did not allow the movement to become a fantasia. In the closing Allegro, he was spirited and exciting. Even when he was aggressive, he was not ungraceful. In these hands, the entire concerto seemed newborn—a considerable achievement.

Solzhenitsyn is a man who obviously loves music, certainly this music. Don't they all? No, actually. Not every professional musician truly loves music, or gives much evidence of it. Most interesting, Solzhenitsyn is not afraid of Mozart. Many are—even some Mozart specialists, approaching the master with shaking knees and handling him with sugar tongs. One simply cannot play Mozart scared; one must embrace him, humbly, yes, but also confidently and joyfully. According to the old saying, only children and elderly sages can play Mozart. Solzhenitsyn, happily, is an exception.

A busy conductor, too, he will no doubt go far. He has an open, generous personality, and he is self-effacing, even as he is charismatic. There may never come a day when Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn is known as Ignat's father. But there will come a day when Ignat's name is a given in the musical world.

Daniele Gatti is already there, eagerly sought by orchestras everywhere. He began the concert with Brahms's *Variations on a Theme by Haydn*, which was warm and heartfelt—Brahmsian—but technically imprecise. He closed with the Beethoven Fifth, in which he was all business. Gatti had little time for the philosophical or spiritual. His hard driving—particularly in the second movement—deprived the work of beauty and grace. In all, he sounded like a man who had spent many, many years listening to Toscanini recordings, which is not necessarily healthy for children and other living things.

To his credit, though, the players from London were fully engaged, even in this terribly familiar music, which says something about the conductor and his talents for leadership. Gatti is already impressive; when his mass of black hair gains a little gray, he will probably be all the more so.

—Jay Nordlinger

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The media

The narrative imperative

by James Bowman

Not that one wishes to minimize the importance of political bias in the media, but it cannot be said often enough—certainly, I have said it more than once—that there is something even more determinative of the direction to be taken by the media's political coverage than the well-documented tendency of media-folk to vote Democratic. This is the need to find, particularly in election years, congenial and compelling stories. News coverage of election campaigns eschews the substantive and concentrates on the trivial, as I noted in these pages last month, not only because it is easier and more fun and more attuned to the essentially trivial political interests of the mass audience, but also because it is out of trivialities that the media culture builds the stories on which it is intellectually dependent.

For an illustration of how this narrative-imperative tends to override even strong political biases, take *The Hunting of the President*, by Joe Conason and Gene Lyons, a most valuable guide to and documentation of the swirl of scandal that followed Bill and Hillary Clinton from Arkansas to Washington in 1993 and subsequently. Conason and Lyons are, it should be said, Clinton partisans of a near Carvillian degree of fervency. Accordingly, their book is marred by their short-sighted insistence on giving the president and the first lady the benefit of every doubt—and there are a great many more doubts than they would have us think. Moreover, since their book went to press, there have been further revelations of the administration's skullduggery in the suppression of e-mail evidence and of politically motivated decisions by the Justice Department with respect to the 1996 campaign finance scandals.

But even supposing that the Clintons were guilty of a lot, even supposing they were guilty of actual criminal offenses in one or two cases, we cannot but be impressed by how much they were pretty obviously not guilty of that the mainstream media were eager to believe they were. The willingness of seasoned reporters from *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times*, among others, to believe the tales of plea-bargaining crooks and sleaze merchants nearly always got the better of the overwhelming tendency of journalists in general and the editorial culture at all these papers to be Democrats and Clinton supporters.

There are, I believe, two reasons for this strange state of affairs. One is what amounts to an institutional bias of journalism since Watergate in favor of "investigative" assumptions. Some of these are that allegations of wrongdoing by public officials are more likely to be true or to contain an element of truth than they are to be untrue, that anything hidden from the public is prima facie evidence of wrongdoing and, most importantly, that journalistic and popular honor will accrue to those who uncover and publicize such wrongdoing. As it

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is the job of the best and most celebrated journalists to penetrate official "cover-ups," we should expect the supply of cover-ups, or anything that can be sold as a cover-up, to rise to meet the demand.

This is clearly what happened in the mid-1990s when an extraordinary collection of Arkansas charlatans and grotesques came to national prominence by promising evidence of the Clintons' wrongdoing which was not subsequently forthcoming. A great many eminent news organizations were suckered into believing things they should not have believed by the hope of scoops and the professional kudos that their proving true would produce. The incentives were obviously even greater for fringe figures, such as Matt Drudge, whose whole career could be made (and was made) by getting to a story some hours or days ahead of these prestigious organizations.

But the second reason that scandal reporting proliferated during the Clinton years in spite of the media's broad political sympathy with him was the narrative imperative. The "Story" about Bill Clinton was always, from his first appearances before a mass audience in 1992, that of the "Comeback Kid." He was the Comeback Kid before he even had anything to come back from. Then the Gennifer Flowers story, the defeat in the New Hampshire primary, the letter to Colonel Holmes and the draft evasion story, an admission of marijuana use and, much more damaging, the absurd claim that he had not inhaled, were all said by the media to be things that would kill his candidacy with the media (and thus with the public) and then did not.

In other words, the media pretty much invented the Comeback Kid by giving him things to come back from—and then allowing him to come back. But once you've got a Comeback Kid, what are you going to do with him but keep giving him things to come back from? Two things thus became necessary for the media culture that had bought into this story: more career-threatening scandals and more resiliency and ingenuity on the part of the president and his family and his professional apologists in continuing to keep coming back from them. It may not be too far-fetched to suggest that the potency of the myth of the Comeback Kid made itself felt even among the handful of Republican senators whose votes saved him from being removed from office, the one thing he could not have come back from.

What lay behind this myth and the Story which had given rise to it was partly Clinton's background. The fatherless child of rather a ne'er-do-well of a rural Arkansan mother, he had to stand up to an alcoholic stepfather before going on to Georgetown, Oxford, Yale, and a successful political career—this was the late twentieth-century equivalent of the log-cabin story of the previous century. Clinton's overcoming of early disadvantages set up the "comeback" story, but there had to be a twist to it. For the postwar meritocracy had not demanded of the future president any very considerable virtues in return for the rewards of his academic and professional careers. No reading by firelight and learning to write with chalk on the back of a shovel for him! It was enough that he was bright, ambitious, and personable.

Clinton's baby-boom contemporaries who are now in positions of power in the media knew this because most of them had comparable histories. Even if they came from poor backgrounds, and all the more so if they came from relatively privileged ones, they knew that they had done little to deserve the good fortune that the general prosperity, an easy ride through an easy educational system, and the journalistic profession had conferred on them. This consciousness of undesert, if not actual guilt, tended to reinforce what would in any case have been a powerful natural skepticism about one of their own in the White House on the part of post-Watergate journalists.

Hence, the Comeback Kid. It was necessary simultaneously to emphasize a moral sloppiness and insouciance about personal behavior that Clinton shared with many of

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his contemporaries *and* the relative unimportance of such shortcomings in the light of Clinton's political idealism—which he also shared with many of his generation. The immense power of this narrative framework had Clinton confronting new allegations of scandalous behavior and avoiding their potentially lethal consequences throughout his entire time in office. Hardly anyone bothered to look closely at anything which would have damaged this framework, whether it was the flimsiness of the allegations against him or that of his claims to political idealism, which were based on nothing more than Dick Morris's list of trivial, cosmetic, or merely symbolic measures designed to show that he "cared."

Of course, as the Clintonites always say, this is an old Story now. Now the media are going to have to work to produce a new narrative framework for either Al Gore or George W. Bush, who are conveniently enough alike that one Story may do for both or either, since both are children of privilege and, more important, of overshadowing political ancestors. Each has to establish himself as "his own man" by repudiating in some way satisfactory to the press his mentor/father, Bill Clinton in the case of Al Gore and George Bush in the case of George W. Bush. The Story for both of them is in essence that of Oedipus. Whichever of the two murders daddy the more ruthlessly and expeditiously will likely reap a considerable short-term benefit in terms of media willingness to revise the image that both candidates have had, at one time or another, fixed upon them of overrehearsed automatons who look upon high office as a kind of entitlement.

But the story of Oedipus is a tragedy, and so it proved for Bush's father, the last Oedipal candidate. Having done away with his own predecessor by promising a "kinder, gentler" America in his inaugural address, he found as he ran for re-election that the press had turned upon him as one who was "out of touch" with the sufferings of his people. Having pandered to the media by promising more of the "compassion" that they believed Ronald Reagan lacked, he had made himself the prisoner of his own symbolism and laid himself open to the charge of not being compassionate enough. To the media, his pretense of "caring" was far less convincing than Clinton's, whose political career had been built upon it.

It was doubtless perfidious of the press first to have egged on Bush Senior to turn on Reagan by proclaiming his own tender feelings and then, having congratulated him for it, to turn on *him* for not being tender enough, but that is often how these things work. We may want the old king killed, but we do not like for long the man by whose hand the deed is done. This reflection ought to give pause to both of the prospective Oedipodes who will be their party's candidates. It seems likely that whoever wins this year will be another one-term president unless he can turn his Story into something a little more upbeat. Americans, lacking "the tragic sense of life," are likely to be as unsentimental as the ancient Thebans about turning Oedipus out to find his way to Colonus.

But candidates, particularly Republican candidates, are clearly limited in what they can do to change the Story that the media culture has decided best fits them. That's why Dan Quayle has had to retire to the golf course prematurely—a victim, like Clinton, of baby-boomer self-loathing but without the saving grace of the Comeback. The Story of John McCain was perhaps the only Republican story that could have spared us this year from the looming but rather unpromising celebrity death match between Oedipus I and Oedipus II. McCain's story was so compelling that the media fell in love, perhaps even more than they did with Clinton in 1992—so that even when they *knew* that they were being exploited by the flattery of unprecedented and almost unlimited access to the candidate, they clearly didn't care.

Here let me pause and note that, in this, I think the media were right thus to celebrate their places on the Straight Talk Express—

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not because they deserve access to everything but because they have for so long been shut out from access to everything except prepackaged and predigested fare. Irrespective of the Story that first drew them to the senator, the media's rewarding of McCain-like access with fawning coverage and a willingness to overlook faults, whether of a personal or of a political nature, must encourage emulators and do something to ameliorate the tendency of the political culture to consume itself in scandal-mongering, cant, and trivialities. These things can only continue to predominate so long as the pundits and the handlers and the spin-doctors continue to be to the media the real heroes of American politics and politicians only their poor dumb show-animals.

To the media's credit, the McCain Story briefly suggested that they were willing to revert to the old days when politicians were the heroes, at least when there was a Story heroic enough. For it was not only the story of the gallant aviator, the ex-prisoner-of-war who endured five-and-a-half years of ill-treatment by his captors before returning home to be elected to the senate as that great American icon, the "maverick." It was also the story of the romantic and spontaneous lover who romanced the swooning media by speaking plainly and directly instead of through intermediaries and according to worn-out and meaningless rhetorical conventions. Here is one version of the Story as outlined by Peggy Noonan, a Bush supporter. McCain, she writes,

> has captured your imagination. This may get serious. He seems such a relief from—from that other man in your life, George W., the Boss's Son. . . . You've been dating him for a year, and everyone thought marriage was in the cards, but now—now there's Flyboy. And suddenly you realize one of the biggest reasons you couldn't get serious about the Boss's Son is that your parents wanted you to! Mom and pop—let's call them "the Republican establishment"—kept telling you he's a catch. They kept pushing you, for your own good. Well, heck—let them marry him!

In the event, however, as Sean Elder wrote in *Salon*, this old B-movie scenario didn't play out. Instead, "McCain's campaign has been much more like a '60s flick than something from the '40s. . . . It's like one of those movies McCain's buddy Warren Beatty starred in (*Bonnie and Clyde* or *The Parallax View*) in which the good guy gets gunned down in the end, always by the forces of society or the establishment, man."

This seems to me an excellent comparison, because it points up what is the larger problem with heroic narratives in our culture. The Beatty hero—most recently seen in *Bulworth*, which now seems almost prophetic of the McCain phenomenon—is not of epic or tragic stature but essentially a *poseur*. The characters in the movies that Elder mentions are unimaginable as anything but victims. We can always imagine Oedipus and Lear as regal and successful kings or Othello and Macbeth as the men of heroic scale that their admirers think them. That is why they are tragic figures. Neither Bulworth nor Clyde Barrow nor Joe Frady, Beatty's character in *The Parallax View*, were imaginable as anything but victims of the vast forces they found themselves contending with. This is also true of John McCain, who was never quite believable in the role of president, but makes an excellent bleeding corpse with the knife of the Republican Party establishment sticking out of his back.

He himself seems to have recognized this. At least that is to me the only reasonable interpretation of his suicidal attack on Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell on the eve of the Virginia primary. What on earth could have induced him to alienate millions of the most reliable Republican voters, a great many of them, like the reverends themselves, residents of the state he had to carry in a day or two, on the outside chance of picking up a few more votes from Democrats and independents than he was already picking up? It made no sense. If he had attempted to conciliate the reverends, he

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could have run Bush close among Virginia Republicans; if he couldn't stomach that and had just remained quiet about them he still stood a chance of winning. And he would have got the Democrats and independents who were voting anyway.

Instead, he as much as announced with that speech that he didn't want the Republican primary or the Republican nomination. Instead, he wanted to suffer publicly from the faceless, unreformed Evil Empire of institutional Republicanism. McCain had used the word "evil" half-jokingly, as part of his own favorite story-telling in which he compared himself to Luke Skywalker of *Star Wars*, until it was taken up by a *New York Times* reporter who thought he was using it seriously about Robertson and Falwell. Then he had to apologize, just as Virginians and North Dakotans and Washingtonians were going to the polls—and, as it proved, bringing down the McCain starfighter as decisively as a North Vietnamese surface-to-air missile had brought down his A-4 thirty-three years before.

For such a fate was perhaps not surprising given that he owed his national prominence in the first place to his capacity for suffering. His Story was a victim's story, which was one reason why it had a contemporary appeal. At any rate, McCain, if not the media, was more comfortable with the familiar story of his wounded innocence, and during the last week or two of his active campaign had little to say about it apart from complaints about how ill-treated he was by the nasty and "negative" tactics of that awful Mr. Bush. So he was, too, though Bush's shameless demagoguery about the senator's alleged indifference to environmental well-being or reluctance to fund breast-cancer research was hardly more deplorable than the Senator's own demagoguery about the alleged "iron triangle" of media, politicians and "special interests."

This time, too, McCain might have reflected with satisfaction that he was taking his enemy down with him. As Maureen Dowd, ever the bellwether of the media flock, put it,

> by running into the arms of Bob Jones III, Pat Robertson, Strom Thurmond and Dan Quayle, by slighting Catholics and blacks, by switching to a low Atwater-style campaign, Mr. Bush lost touch with all the things that had made him attractive in the first place. . . .
>
> W.'s problem was analogous to his father's in '92: an establishment candidate with a weak message and communication skills outmaneuvered by forces he never foresaw and did not know how to react to.
>
> Down south, the Texas governor simply tried to become the Arizona senator. But his backers were not impressed when the rich kid ran through $50 million to come up with a slogan as transcendentally dorky as "Reformer With Results."
>
> Meanwhile, Mr. McCain went the other way, becoming the nice guy, taking negative ads off the air, and the new hot fund-raiser, scaring up tons of money on the Internet. After all W.'s early bragging about garnering a lot of the Hispanic and black vote in Texas, and his vow to rally "the armies of compassion," it was the challenger who was more open, attracting independents and Democrats.
>
> Mr. Bush could not morph into Mr. McCain, but he did manage to morph into Steve Forbes, running a destructive—and self-destructive—campaign against a war-hero senator.

This certainly has the makings of The Story about Bush, if Bush is to be cast as loser in the general election. The rival story, if he looks more like a winner, will be that the challenge from McCain toughened and hardened him, made a man of him in fact. Perhaps he will even be allowed to have become "his own man" without having to mug George Sr. and the Republican establishment that he and McCain have hitherto taken it in turn to abuse. If so, the old Flyboy will have performed one last service for his country and for its desperately impoverished political and media culture.

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Books

Tiresias redux

by Theodore Dalrymple

When Gregor Samsa woke up one morning he was a gigantic insect; when Professor Donald N. McCloskey woke up one morning he was a gigantic woman. It is a matter of opinion as to which metamorphosis was the more bizarre or surreal.

Of course, Professor McCloskey's metamorphosis took rather longer than Mr. Samsa's, and was much more expensive. In fact, he had been a cross-dresser for many years when he had what he calls his epiphany, a quasi-supernatural message (from where, from whom?) telling him to drop mere pretence and actually be a woman, anatomy and all. It was his hope and ambition that henceforth all his acquaintances would be able to say to him, "Seems, madam! Nay, it is; I know not 'seems.'"

In the old days, people had religious conversions; nowadays, they have sex changes. *Crossing*[1] is a memoir of the emergence of the imago Deirdre from the chrysalis Donald, who was well into his fifties at the time and a professor of economic history at the University of Iowa in the bargain. A major academic press has seen fit to publish this memoir, no doubt a sign of the ubiquity in academia of gender studies. My copy appears to be of the second printing: so philanthropy and 5 percent have now become political correctness and 5 percent, at least in the publishing world. On the cover is a photograph of Deirdre leaning backwards in a chair and roaring with laughter, her hands crossed on her chest. But her laughter is to mirth what the preaching of Jim Bakker is to religious experience: evidently some people are as incapable of distinguishing real from ersatz emotion as others are of distinguishing red from green. It is, indeed, the characteristic blindness of our age.

Professor McCloskey writes in the third person, referring to Donald as he and to Deirdre as she. His/her current thoughts about the past are italicized in bold: they are brief interjections. This gives to the writing a kind of false naïveté, but also suggests—despite protestations of integration, wholeness, and happiness—a persistent double, or even triple, consciousness. It also has the effect of distancing Professor McCloskey from the moral significance of and responsibility for his/her own acts. But no one could accuse the professor of hiding his/her meaning, for on the whole he/she writes clearly and directly.

The book is full of banal, greeting-card emotional gush. Perhaps this was inevitable, given the professor's fashionable opinion that all emotion should be publicly expressed and none hidden. This primitive attitude leads to a world in which exhibitionism masquerades as candor, and in which hugging is the highest manifestation of virtue. But a world without closets is a world without values, and a world without values is a world without meaning.

1 *Crossing*, by Deirdre N. McCloskey; University of Chicago Press, 288 pages, $25.

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Confessional exhibitionists like Professor McCloskey demand or extort their readers' sympathies rather than evoke or arouse them. They imply that anyone who is unsympathetic to their unusual or disagreeable proclivities is a monster of bigotry; and just as there is a certain type of rich person who demonstrates how discriminating he is by approving of nothing he is offered for sale, so there is a certain type of intellectual who demonstrates how virtuous (that is to say, tolerant) he is by disapproving of no conduct, no matter how bizarre or deviant, that comes to his notice. Professor McCloskey knows well how to manipulate this liberal-progressive mentality, and terrorize it into acquiescence, suggesting several times that those who do not sympathize with him spend their free moments searching out the differently-libidoed on the streets to assault and murder them. The choice is stark: either unconditional approval of transsexualism or the Ku Klux Klan.

As it happens, Professor McCloskey's view of femininity is definitely at the *Kinder, Küche, Kirche* end of the spectrum, and if anything could ever make me join hands with Andrea Dworkin, Susan Brownmiller, Gloria Steinem, et al., it is his detailed description of the womanly—or is it girlish?—joys of applying mascara and other items of makeup. Men, in Professor McCloskey's view, are competitive, whereas women are cooperative; men are analytic and fact-bound, whereas women are imaginative and emotional; men are cold and calculating while women are warm and giving. In short, men are ice-people while women are sun-people. The phrase at the head of the acknowledgments conveys the general flavor: "That womanly solidarity and grace." Ipecacuanha itself is less nauseating.

Professor McCloskey's raging egomania (another cultural trait of our age) is nowhere more evident than in his treatment, both literal and literary, of his wife and two children. He had been married, happily by all accounts, for over thirty years when he decided to become a woman; at any rate, there is nothing to suggest that his wife, who had borne him two children, had been anything other than loyal, faithful, and devoted.

This, however, appears to have imparted no sense of obligation to Professor McCloskey. His wife, who had hitherto accepted his cross-dressing with unease, was completely unable to accept his proposed transformation into a woman. And this inability is the subject of Professor McCloskey's petulant rage. Why could she not accept it? The answer, of course, was that she was a crossphobic bigot (disapproval of anything these days is transformed semantically into a quasi-medical condition, a phobia, that implies there is something wrong with the disapprover rather than with the disapproved). His children were no better able than she to accept the new situation: they too are condemned by their father for their lack of understanding.

In Professor McCloskey's world, understanding is a strictly one-way street; it is due to him, in infinite quantities, but he owes it to no one else, least of all to the woman to whom he was married for thirty years and who had never been other than good to him. There is no evidence in this book of a single moment's serious or genuine attempt at understanding his wife's distress. It surely takes very little sympathetic imagination to understand what effect his decision must have had upon his wife: how it robbed her of her happy past, as the cruel malady of Alzheimer's disease is apt to do, leaving only bitterness, confusion, and misery behind. It never occurred to Professor McCloskey that what he wanted for himself was as a feather in the moral balance of how he ought to behave, that he owed it to his wife and children not to proceed with the change, and that this duty outweighed all other considerations so overwhelmingly that only a monster of self-importance could have thought otherwise. He writes warmly only of those who accepted his decision without demur, for example the rector of the Erasmus University in Rotter-

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dam, where he had been offered a visiting professorship in his incarnation as Donald, and who, on being informed that Donald was now Deirdre, was so liberal-minded that he could not even understand why he should have been told of the change. What wonderful openmindedness, what supreme compassion—without personal cost, of course, unlike that demanded of his wife.

Professor McCloskey explains that his wife did not truly love him and probably had never done so, otherwise she would have accepted the change. She should have loved him for himself. This fatuous assertion is a corollary of the philosophy of the "real me," a belief in the Platonic essence of personal identity (always a benign essence, of course) which is completely unaffected by the actual sublunary conduct of the person in question. This philosophy, which is shallow, evil, and stupid in equal measure, is an intellectual figleaf to conceal the most uncompromising whimsicality and lack of restraint. I am reminded of a prisoner recently who felt very sorry for himself. He had doused his former girlfriend in gasoline and threatened to set her alight: a threat which she chose to take seriously because his previous marriage had ended when he threw battery acid over his former wife. Poor man! Why couldn't these women understand that, as he put it to me, "I don't do them things, doctor, that's just not me." Why, in short, couldn't they love him for himself and disregard the epiphenomenal gasoline and battery acid? Professor McCloskey, like the prisoner, must find their obtuseness very puzzling.

Not that real-meism is a new philosophy or an innovation of Professor McCloskey. In *Christopher and His Kind*, Christopher Isherwood's 1976 memoir in which he, like Professor McCloskey, refers to himself in the third person, we learn that Isherwood fell under the influence of the anthropologist John Layard, who himself was a disciple of the psychologist Homer Lane. It was at the end of the 1920s, and according to the two gurus, "There is only one sin: disobedience to the inner law of our own nature." Or, as Polonius put it, "To thine own self be true and it must follow as the night the day," etc. Shakespeare, however, was capable of irony, which Lane, Layard, and McCloskey are not.

Throughout *Crossing*, we feel the baleful influence of John Stuart Mill's famous dictum that the sole end for which mankind is warranted, either individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of any of their number, is self-protection, and that the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community is to prevent harm to others. Outrage to the opinions of others —even of a faithful wife of thirty years—is not to count as one of these harms. Ergo what Professor McCloskey did was all right: for in his world, which is that of fathomless shallows, there is no sphere between the illegal and the morally permissible.

Everything Professor McCloskey says of his sex change could have been said had he been a necrophiliac instead of a transsexual. He could have accused his wife of necrophobia had she objected to the establishment in the family basement of a morgue-cum-bedroom. And is not necrophilia, almost by definition, a victimless crime? The outrage to the feelings of the relatives of the deceased is not to count: indeed, the problem, if there is one, is their lack of tolerance and understanding. And if a necrophiliac professor of romance languages, let us say, should decide to cash in on the present vogue for confessional exhibitionism (there have always been necrophiliacs, after all, and isn't it time we all grew up and acknowledged it?), I sincerely hope that the University of Chicago Press would not be so deeply prejudiced, so necrophobic in short, as to refuse publication.

Although Professor McCloskey is not an ironist, this is not to say that his book is completely without irony. At one point, he remarks that he cannot see why people should have been startled at the removal of his penis: it was not as if a functioning leg had been surgically removed, after all. But

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as it happens, there has recently been a controversy in Britain about a surgeon in Scotland who amputated a perfectly healthy leg from two people who claimed that they felt the limb to be so extraneous that its presence was ruining their lives. One of them, it was later revealed, ran a website for people who found amputees sexually alluring: there being no appetite so perverse that it does not grow with the feeding. And, of course, the surgeon soon received other requests from around the world, one from an American woman who felt that she would be happier without both of the legs with which a negligent and careless Nature had so mistakenly endowed her, and had bought a wheelchair to practice for her forthcoming happily legless condition. Does not St. Matthew enjoin us to pluck out the eye that offends us, it being better to enter into life with one eye than to be cast into hell with two? And what could be more hellish, in our modern world of ever-expanding human rights, than to have one's desires permanently frustrated?

Morally handicapped

Jan Dalley Diana Mosley.
Alfred A. Knopf, 336 pages, $27.50

reviewed by Brooke Allen

It is lucky for England that her homegrown would-be Führer finally turned out to be little more than a weird historical footnote. Sir Oswald Mosley, leader of the British Union of Fascists (BUF) and its "Defense Force" of thuggish Blackshirts, was a sinister character, to be sure, but he was also something of a buffoon. Mosley's one-time associate Harold Nicolson saw the perils inherent in his chosen role early on, and warned him that

> fascism is not suitable to England. In Italy there was a long history of secret societies. In Germany there was a long tradition of militarism. Neither had a sense of humour. In England anything on these lines is doomed to failure and ridicule.

Whether it was really because of the national sense of humor (a self-flattering notion), or because of the country's long and largely successful system of parliamentary government, or in fact because of fatal flaws in Mosley's own character—underneath everything he was, as Beatrice Webb intuited early in his career, a cynic—England was to prove infertile soil for his movement, and Mosley, after a brief flirtation with power, spent the last forty years of his life a pariah.

It is possible—and to be hoped—that Mosley will be best known to future generations as the original for P. G. Wodehouse's immortal character Sir Roderick Spode, leader of a fascist organization called the Black Shorts. In *The Code of the Woosters*, the usually timorous Bertie Wooster musters his courage and faces down the bullying leader:

> Just because you have succeeded in inducing a handful of half-wits to disfigure the London scene by going about in black shorts, you think you're someone. You hear them shouting "Heil Spode!" and you imagine it is the Voice of the People. That is where you make your bloomer. What the Voice of the People is saying is: "Look at that frightful ass Spode swanking about in footer bags! Did you ever in your puff see such a perfect perisher?"

Mosley was also lampooned, and even more ruthlessly, considering the source, by his sister-in-law Nancy Mitford in her farcical novel *Wigs on the Green*, a silly soufflé of a book that would seem the height of absurdity if one didn't know the facts of the Mitfords' lives, but was in fact not far short of kitchen-sink realism.

Mosley's notoriety was heightened by his marriage to Diana, the most beautiful of the beautiful Mitford sisters. Diana Mosley, today nearly ninety and residing in France, wrote a memoir—*A Life of Contrasts* (1977)—but has never been the subject of a biog-

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raphy; now Jan Dalley, literary editor of the *Financial Times* and the wife of the poet Andrew Motion, has produced a readable life of this surpassingly strange woman. It couldn't have been an easy task. Diana Mosley's character is in essence a negative one: her life, her gestures, her opinions were quite conscious reflections of those of her man. She deliberately allowed herself to be obscured by her husband's gaudier personality, as she had been obscured during childhood and adolescence by her powerful older siblings, Nancy and Tom. Diana Mosley has always been a cipher, and, Dalley's efforts notwithstanding, she remains one.

Much, probably too much, has already been written about the highly colored Mitford family, and Dalley doesn't waste much space rehearsing the familiar tale. To sum them up: Nancy, the eldest, became a well-known comic novelist whose two best books, *The Pursuit of Love* and *Love in a Cold Climate*, created a potent romantic myth about the Mitford family; Unity turned Nazi as a teenager, moved to Germany, became one of Hitler's most visible hangers-on, and shot herself (not fatally) upon the outbreak of war; Jessica became a Communist, eloped with her cousin to fight in the Spanish Civil War, and eventually moved to America, where she spent the rest of her life as a prominent left-wing journalist; Deborah, the youngest, became the Duchess of Devonshire. Only the more retiring Pam and Tom, who was killed in the Burma campaign of 1945, kept out of the limelight.

It was a family of passionate, often violently expressed convictions, and at first the self-contained Diana seemed out of place in it. Her political awakening came during the General Strike of 1926: she was shaken by the poverty and unemployment she saw as though for the first time, and turned away from her parents' dearly-held conservatism to become a Lloyd George liberal.

Lord and Lady Redesdale, the Mitford parents, did not believe in sending girls to school, and Diana's formal education was limited to instruction from a motley series of governesses and a few months at the Cours Fénelon in Paris at the age of sixteen. She read widely under the guidance of her older siblings, and became very well informed; later she expressed her belief that "it really depends, ultimately, on oneself whether one is educated or not." The Mitfords' life was hermetic by modern standards, but for a curious and impressionable girl there were potent outside influences to be soaked up: the gregarious Nancy, six years older than Diana, brought home many of her friends, aesthetic and homosexual "butterflies" who tended to enrage the conventionally masculine Lord Redesdale. It was the high noon of the Bright Young Things, and Nancy's friends, who included John Betjeman, Robert Byron, and Evelyn Waugh, eventually became Diana's. Diana found frequent refuge, too, with the Churchills at Chartwell; Clementine Churchill was a cousin of Lady Redesdale. (Dalley points out that Diana had the odd distinction of being one of the few people who knew both Hitler and Churchill well.)

Diana's time in Paris, where she stayed with the painter Paul-César Helleu and his family, was her first real journey outside of the family orbit, and it came as a revelation of freedom and sophistication. Sadly, Helleu fell ill and died that year, and Diana returned to England. The hiatus was supposed to be only temporary, but disaster struck: Muv (Lady Redesdale) discovered and read Diana's Paris diary, with its descriptions of her very mild amorous escapades. "Even by the standards of Mitford family storms," writes Dalley, "the ensuing argument was a big one." Neither of Diana's parents would speak to her for days; she was forbidden to return to Paris and banished to the seaside with her three little sisters and their governess. Bored and furious, smarting under the ignominy, Diana vowed to get away from home once and for all, and as quickly as possible.

With this goal in mind she became engaged only months after her official debut,

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choosing a young man who was kind, rich, intelligent, spectacularly eligible, and deeply antipathetic to her own personality. Bryan Guinness was twenty-two years old when they met, a popular member of her social circle, and heir to the fabulous Guinness Brewery fortune. They had only known each other three months when he proposed, and it seems clear that they misread one another from the start: Bryan "loved in [her] the fresh country girl he took her to be" while Diana, desperate for independence, persuaded herself that she really cared for this pleasant, undemanding man who offered it to her.

They were married in January 1929 at a huge society wedding, honeymooned in Paris, and returned to a pretty house in Westminster. Less than two years earlier, Diana had been considered too young to come downstairs for a dinner party; now she had a rich husband and a large establishment, and she quickly became one of the leading younger hostesses, entertaining constantly both in London and at their country house. She had plenty of avid admirers—Waugh, depressed at the breakup of his first marriage, fell in love with her during her first pregnancy, a situation he described in his aborted novel *Work Suspended*—but she was not, nor would she ever be, interested in casual affairs. It was not until she met the mesmeric Mosley that she turned away from Bryan.

It was the spring of 1932: her new lover was thirty-five, she not yet twenty-two, with two baby sons. Sir Oswald Ernald Mosley, sixth baronet, was a member of the old aristocracy. Expelled from Sandhurst in 1914 for the kind of violent altercation that would later make him notorious, he was hurriedly recalled two months later with the outbreak of World War I, in which he served until invalided out in 1916. Back in London for the last two years of the war, he launched himself into social and political life, eventually gaining a seat as Unionist MP for Harrow, supporting Lloyd George's coalition and advocating a sort of "socialistic imperialism." "The beginning of Mosley's parliamentary career contained, in embryo, all its later characteristics," Dalley writes. "From the start, he hardly seemed to care which party he chose . . . his own views were what mattered."

Mosley fell out with Lloyd George over the latter's Irish policies, specifically the use of the hated "Black and Tans," and he was instrumental in bringing about the negotiations with Sinn Fein that led to the declaration of the Irish Free State. "For the next few years Mosley was the darling of the liberal press . . . and of progressive thinkers and the growing Labour movement." In 1922 he won a seat in parliament as an independent, and two years later was recruited by Ramsay Macdonald for the new Labour Party.

In 1920 Mosley had married the middle daughter of Lord Curzon, Lady Cynthia—always called Cimmie. Aside from being an heiress, Cimmie was a tremendous political asset, for she possessed all the warmth and genuineness the hard, glittering Mosley so conspicuously lacked. Many Labour members taunted the couple for their ostentatious wealth and lifestyle, but that worked two ways: as Dalley points out, Mosley's "rousing speeches, and the sight of Lady Cynthia swathed in her furs, drew working-class supporters in their thousands." In 1927 Mosley was elected to a Labour seat, and two years later Cimmie joined him in parliament.

Although he truly loved Cimmie, Mosley's prodigious energy was never satisfied unless he was carrying on one or more extramarital affairs, mostly with bored young married women of his own set. (His motto: "Vote Labour, Sleep Tory"). He was, as he would continue to be during the years with Diana, quite straightforward about his goings-on, even procuring a bachelor pad just a few hundred yards from the family home, complete with a large bed on a raised dais in a curtained alcove.

Mosley had entered the cabinet in 1929 as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, with a special responsibility for unemployment.

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The Depression was underway, and like many others Mosley felt that the slow give-and-take of parliamentary democracy was not equal to the challenge. He issued a memorandum proposing a series of short-term emergency schemes. Many of them were sensible, the same sort of ideas that Keynes was advocating and that the Roosevelt administration in America would later adopt, but others smacked to Mosley's opponents of dictatorship, and the memorandum was rejected.

Mosley resigned from the cabinet and gathered around him a group of disaffected MPs and thinkers including the all-powerful press lords Rothermere and Beaverbrook. In December he issued a proposed policy called the "Mosley Manifesto," and three months later he launched his "New Party." Some of the New Party members were pure socialists, while some, like Mosley himself, were moving toward fascism. The movement was soon rent apart from within and formally disbanded in 1932. Mosley's parliamentary career was over; his life as a fascist now began in earnest.

It was at this point that he and Diana met. For her it was, as her son Jonathan Guinness later wrote, "the passion of Juliet and . . . the conversion of St. Paul; emotion and conviction were inseparable." "In politics, as in everything else, Diana had a taste for the extreme," Dalley comments, and Mosley—whom most people called Tom but whom Diana dubbed Kit—satisfied that taste, both on the personal and political levels. Mosley had no intention of losing Cimmie; if Diana wanted him, she had to accept him on his terms. She accepted them, and in an extraordinarily risky and, for the era, outrageous move she left Bryan and set up on her own, living openly as Mosley's mistress, with small hope of marriage.

Mosley possessed an enviable gift for eating his cake and having it too. He squired Diana about with little care for the effects their romance was having on Cimmie; he continued to sleep with other women, too, including Cimmie's younger sister Baba (who was married to a man with the wonderfully Wodehousian name of Fruity Metcalfe). Then in 1933, very unexpectedly, Cimmie Mosley died.

This was a stroke of luck for Diana, but at the time she was afraid to interpret it as such; Mosley was devastated, and Diana "realized straight away that Cimmie's death, with all its ramifications of guilt and grief and family concerns, might spell trouble for her relationship." Cimmie's sisters, Baba Metcalfe and Lady Irene Ravensdale, rallied round Mosley and did their best to expel Diana from his life.

> It was agreed that Baba and Mosley should spend the summer motoring through France together, while Irene took the children away on a cruise: Fruity Metcalfe, Baba's husband, was given a talking-to by Irene and told he must quell his jealousy and allow Baba to comfort Mosley, "for Cimmie's sake."

Now Mosley began to toy with Baba and Diana as he had once toyed with Diana and Cimmie, and Diana knew that she would have to play her own hand with restraint. With Mosley and Baba off to France and her Guinness children on holiday with their father, she made what was to be a fateful plan: she and Unity, by now an awkward and unpopular debutante, would pay a visit to Germany at the invitation of Putzi Hanfstaengl, Hitler's foreign press secretary, whom Diana had met at a London party.

The two soon-to-be-infamous sisters set off for Munich, arriving just in time for the 1933 Parteitag, the first Nuremberg rally of the Nazi era. Diana's later contention that her trip had nothing to do with the BUF is dubious; so is her claim that "We heard the speeches Hitler made, most of them very short, and we understood not a single word." That's as may be, but since these speeches formally launched Hitler's campaign for racial purity, it seems odd that she heard or comprehended no talk about *Kultur*, *Rasse*, and *Volk* on this German trip. She was deeply admiring of everything she witnessed there.

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Unity was more than admiring: she was besotted, and from the spring of 1934 she spent most of her time in Germany, providing Diana and Tom Mitford, also a budding fascist, with a convenient home away from home. (David Pryce-Jones's *Unity Mitford* [1976] provides a vivid chronicle of these prewar years.) Unity, who seems to have been emotionally if not mentally retarded, developed a whopping crush on the Führer and was an assiduous stalker, sitting in his favorite Munich restaurant for hours and gaping at Hitler until he eventually befriended this big, blonde, Aryan goddess. Unity introduced Diana to Hitler in 1935, and for next four years the sisters were regularly seen in his company, by his side at every Parteitag, at every Bayreuth Festival, and at the 1936 Olympic Games. Hitler was even a guest—one of the very few—at the Mosleys' wedding.

Diana thought her ties with the German regime would be helpful to Mosley. In the end, they merely added extra tarnish to the violence, the racist oratory, and the contempt for democracy that fatally discredited the BUF. Mosley had many gifts, but good judgment in choosing his associates was not one of them, and from the beginning he entrusted vital duties within the BUF to the unstable extremists in his camp, for example handing over the movement's official organ, *The Blackshirt*, to the crazed anti-Semite William Joyce (who was executed in 1946 for his seditious wartime broadcasts as "Lord Haw-Haw"). The famous BUF roughhouses—the Olympia rally of 1934, the Battle of Cable Street—continued to attract the worst sort of riffraff to the BUF cause, and to drive the more thoughtful and respectable elements away from the party. As early as 1937 Goebbels privately dismissed Mosley as a "busted flush," and was on the lookout for new and more powerful allies in England.

Mosley and Diana were secretly married in 1936, at the Goebbels home in Berlin. Three years had passed since Cimmie's death, during which time Diana and Baba (now known to her friends as Baba Blackshirt) had continued to enjoy Mosley's company on a time-share basis. Thanks to its own excesses, the BUF was on its way to bankruptcy and disgrace; the wearing of Blackshirt regalia was outlawed and the BBC put a ban on appearances by Mosley that was not lifted until 1968. Mosley devoted his waning influence to a doomed campaign for peace, which he carried on right up to the outbreak of hostilities in 1939. In May of 1940, he was arrested under Defense Regulation 18b, a wartime suspension of *habeas corpus*, and sent to Brixton Prison.

For the time being Diana, who had a newborn baby, was left alone, but there was a growing movement to have this sinister character put behind bars as well: among those who insisted that she was dangerous and urged the government to lock her up were Diana's sister Nancy and her former father-in-law, Lord Moyne. She was eventually arrested in late June and taken to Holloway.

Her privations, at least at first, were real enough, though it is hard to feel much sympathy for this privileged woman who happily condoned murder and concentration camps. At the end of 1941 she and Mosley, at Churchill's personal request, were granted permission to be together, moving to the Preventive Detention Block at Holloway where they lived with four other couples. Sex offenders ("because they are so clean and honest") were sent to do their housework, and Diana befriended a pretty bigamist. The prisoners were allowed to grow produce in the sooty soil; Diana, in her inimitably Marie Antoinette-ish tone, remarked that she "never grew such *fraises de bois* again."

Mosley's health began to deteriorate in prison, and in November 1943 he and Diana were released by order of the Home Secretary, Herbert Morrison, who told parliament that there was "no undue risk to national security" and that he had no wish to "make martyrs of persons undeserving of the honour." They spent the rest of the war under house arrest, getting reacquainted

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with their various children, including the two new little boys who hardly knew them.

Diana was thirty-three when she was released from prison. The greater part of her life was still in front of her, but, as Dalley remarks, "what she and Mosley had lived for—their political dreams and ideals, their guiding sense of purpose—was already over." She exercised her considerable energies in decorating and running their various houses in England, Ireland, and France, and in making life comfortable and pleasant for Mosley. He continued rather half-heartedly in politics, founding the Union Movement whose main platform was a campaign against non-white immigration. Diana became a part-time writer and editor, launching *The European*, the organ for the Union Movement, writing a book about the Duchess of Windsor and a group portrait of some of her interesting friends, *Loved Ones*, and editing Mosley's "surprisingly readable" and successful autobiography, *My Life* (1968). Mosley died in 1980. In 1982 his son Nicholas published *Rules of the Game*, the first volume of a searching and honest biography of his father. It was a little *too* honest for Diana, who never spoke to Nicholas again.

Mosley and Diana remained defiant and unapologetic for the rest of their lives. The Holocaust was regrettable, but it was none of their doing: Diana professed a belief that "it was all part of the appalling price innocent people pay for a misguided war, and . . . it never would have happened if Britain and France had not declared war on Hitler"—a position, as Dalley comments, of "breathtaking illogic." They simply "never," as Diana herself wrote, "considered that Hitler's excesses were anything to do with [them]."

It must be admitted that fascism, whatever subsequent high line Diana has chosen to take, destroyed the Mitford family. Lady Redesdale, under the influence of Unity, Diana, and Tom, became an enthusiastic convert to the creed. Lord Redesdale, who unconditionally loved and admired Tom, went along for the ride at first, but was soon repelled by events in Germany. His relationship with his wife never recovered, and from the early days of the war they lived apart. Unity was irreparably brain damaged by her attempted suicide in 1939 and lived with the bullet lodged in her head until she died from aftereffects of the wound in 1948. Tom, the golden boy, was killed in Hitler's war; Jessica, who despised her sisters' politics, became an exile and to some extent an outcast from the family.

Lady Gladwyn (formerly Mrs. Gladwyn Jebb) remarked in her diary in 1947 that "Both Diana and Oswald Mosley are evil characters, Lucifer fallen from Heaven, and he in particular has a sinister and almost hypnotic power." Jan Dalley has valiantly tried to muster some sympathy for Diana, but in vain. Diana didn't have the excuse of stupidity, like Unity; she was intelligent, cultivated, and intimately connected with some of the most brilliant and admirable people in England. Just as some people are mentally handicapped, she seems to have been morally so, and if, for a short, ugly time, she became a visible symbol of the rottenness at the heart of Western civilization, she has no one to blame but herself.

The pilgrim returns

James Fox Five Sisters:
The Langhornes of Virginia.
Simon & Schuster, 482 pages, $30

reviewed by Lauren Weiner

Just what is a Southern belle, anyway? The received definition—a form of womanhood that is dainty, sugary, and demure—begins to totter on its foundations soon after one begins *Five Sisters: The Langhornes of Virginia*. Lizzie, Irene, Nancy, Phyllis, and Nora Langhorne—whose lives spanned nearly a century, from 1867 to 1964—are renowned as the last of the Southern belles. They were "genealogically obsessed" like most Virginia gentry. They danced at fancy

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cotillions and racked up marriage proposals by the dozen. We notice, however, as James Fox takes us into the horsy and free-wheeling milieu in which this family grew up after the Civil War, that these women, coming at the end of a tradition, almost casually reshaped it to their liking.

Though it makes sense that the first female ever to fight her way to a seat in the British House of Commons would be an upstart American, it takes some explaining —and Fox does it wonderfully—to make it seem equally natural that the upstart in question should have been born and bred in the Old Dominion, last redoubt of the Southern patriarchy, as Nancy Langhorne Astor was. Nancy and her sisters were a "sectional" phenomenon, but one can see in them national traits, both good and bad. Therein lies the significance of this account by Fox, a journalist, author, and grandson of Phyllis Langhorne Brand. This family biography is a treasure trove for anyone interested in the complexities of race, class, nationality, and sexual politics in America and England from the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century.

If we Americans are to be understood as having a national character, we can find its nature and sources illuminated here. One major source would have to be the "first families" of Virginia—or, to be more correct, those who claimed to be descended therefrom. Chiswell Dabney ("Chillie") Langhorne, an impoverished country squire turned Reconstruction-era businessman, insisted to whoever would listen that his was an ancient lineage. And his sort could be just as snobby as the New England descendants of the Puritans. The difference Fox captures is that it was a snobbery unaccompanied by dourness. The New England hierarchs evinced Calvinist grimness. Not so the Virginia squirearchs. The institution of slavery left—in this respect, at least—an oddly light-hearted legacy. Fox writes that "there was nothing self-conscious about the way the Langhornes carried on" at Mirador, their antebellum, colonnaded house on the James River. They lived closely with their black servants, many of whom were former slaves,

> closely enough to inherit the religious feelings and diurnal superstitions of their black staff, and to adopt their particular humor and sense of the ridiculous.

While the male Langhorne children and the eldest daughter, Lizzie, mostly stayed at home (they are treated as minor players in the family saga), first Irene, and then Nancy and Phyllis, took over the debutante balls in Philadelphia and New York. They caught "the romantic Yankee eye" and fit neatly into "the northerners' myth of the Old South." With an almost nakedly mercenary zeal, all selected well-heeled Bostonians as husbands. (Of the three, only Irene would stay out of divorce court, however.)

The Langhornes would never have become famous if they had not ventured forth, and this, Fox says, was their father's doing: "Chillie Langhorne's instructions were contradictory: to be a Belle but also to make your own destiny." The results were likewise contradictory. Henry James, a frequent guest at Nancy Langhorne Astor's home in England, caught the essence of the contradiction when he noted that he found his hostess to be "but a reclaimed barbarian, with all her bounty, spontaneity and charm, too." The novelist saw her as "fine material," and no wonder. She had many of the qualities—not just "spunk," but also a moralizing side—out of which James fashioned the "self-made girl" of his fictions. In his 1884 story "Pandora," he created a kind of ironic fanfare around her emergence. Of Miss Pandora Day an excited society matron exclaims: "Why, she's the new type. It has only come up lately. They have had articles about it in the papers."

James anticipated by six years the illustrator Charles Dana Gibson's creation of the wildly popular "Gibson Girl"—the pert, athletic figure who romped across newspaper cartoons, posters, and items of memorabilia, besting her tongue-tied (but

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charmed) beau at sports. The Langhorne connection with this pop-cultural icon is that the beautiful Irene Langhorne married Charles Dana Gibson in 1895 and conceived of herself, ever after, as the "Gibson Girl" incarnate. She lived so happily with Gibson in New York City that Fox consigns her to the second rank of characters. The biographer finds that Nancy and Phyllis Langhorne were more truly like the "Gibson Girl" than Irene was.

And not coincidentally, these two receive the lion's share of attention in the book. They—and their feckless sister Nora, the baby of the family—make great copy because domestic turmoil and public controversy swirled about them. Why did Nancy and Phyllis Langhorne put an ocean between themselves and their beloved Mirador? Fox speculates that they left behind bad marriages and emigrated to England (supposedly "the Virginian's natural second home") because it was disgraceful to be a divorcée in America. They collected their children, shipped thoroughbreds over from Virginia, and "made their mark on English society on the hunting fields of Leicestershire." They moved among royalty and began to disdain many of the Americans they bumped into on the transatlantic social circuit as Yankee philistines.

In England the suitors lined up, including noblemen. Phyllis would marry this time for love, but Nancy again chose someone bankable: an expatriated American who hadn't lived in New York since his teens, the fabulously wealthy Waldorf Astor. Marriage was a matter of prudence for Nancy since "she would rather, quite literally, compete [against men] than flirt with them." Her letters show a possessive attachment to Phyllis that interfered with her sister's romances. It got so bad that the man Phyllis intended to take as her second husband, the British soldier and big game hunter Henry Douglas Pennant, had to send Nancy an admonitory letter:

> Whether you like it or not she will love me alive or dead better than anything else, it is natural for woman to love man more intensely than for woman to love woman.

In the end, Phyllis did not treat Pennant well, as her grandson conveys unflinchingly. In a chapter that would be funny if it weren't so awful, he examines the wartime correspondence between Phyllis, who was getting cold feet about the impending marriage, and Pennant, a captain fighting in the trenches of northeastern France. As the men around him were being mowed down, she discouraged him from accepting a transfer that would have ensured his physical survival. She was not literally responsible for the captain's death in the allied assault near Neuve-Chapelle; still, here was self-serving behavior to make even Scarlett O'Hara blush.

Nancy steered her sister instead toward Bob Brand, a member of the Astors' growing social set at Cliveden, their Restoration-baroque estate outside of London. Nancy was ambitious to gather about her her "intellectual betters," regardless of social class or ideology. Brand—an excellent match for Phyllis, as it turned out—was part of an important group of young Tory diplomats and economists who had brokered the Boer War settlement in South Africa. Fox tells much of the English part of the Langhorne family story through the eyes of Brand, his maternal grandfather. He paraphrases Brand on why Nancy Astor so captivated the British elites:

> It was . . . her frankness and friendliness, her ability to connect immediately, that was so utterly foreign, a direct import from the South, and which broke all known rules of engagement.

She made fun of the English class system even as she reveled in sitting atop it.

The Astors were "wet" Tories of the do-gooding, socially reforming sort. Waldorf Astor, with his wife's help, won a seat in parliament representing a working-class area, the Sutton division of Plymouth. But when he inherited a title of nobility in 1919,

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he could no longer serve in the House of Commons. Fox does not explain by what morganatic arrangement it was permissible for Nancy Astor, now Lady Astor, to stand for his seat, but stand she did. And she hit it off with the poor and laboring men and women of Plymouth, who loved her forthrightness and wit.

When she entered the House of Commons in 1919 she was greeted coldly, but her feisty humor—and, one imagines, her noble title—enabled her to give as good as she got. Suffrage for women over age thirty had only just been enacted in Britain the previous year. As was true in America, one effect of letting women into politics was that it became, if not more moral, then surely more moralistic. Lady Astor was a rambunctious Virginian, but there was a prim side to her personality expressed in, among other things, her aversion to drink. She and her husband were teetotalers, highly unusual for their social set. Her embrace of the then-new doctrine of Christian Science bolstered this ascetic streak. Like some avenging WCTU-er she used her parliamentary megaphone to proselytize Britons on behalf of—of all things—restricting their access to spirits. Her one legislative distinction, according to Fox, was in putting through a bill to raise Britain's pub drinking age to eighteen.

Her fellow Tory MPs lustily opposed such measures. Winston Churchill, for one, always found them to be "entirely uncalled-for and contrary to the best traditions of British freedom." Harrumph. Churchill and Lady Astor disagreed about a lot of things, most notably how to respond to the rise of Adolf Hitler in Germany. Lady Astor was utterly misguided on this question. Bob Brand was the one member of her circle who, because he travelled to Germany on matters of state, saw the Nazi threat clearly and opposed it. That, at least, is what his grandson says. In fact, Fox does make a convincing case for Brand's rectitude on the issue, and, moreover, for discarding the notion that the "Cliveden Set," as it came notoriously to be called, were a cabal of latent fascists directing British policy toward appeasement.

The book offers an engrossing account of the propaganda efforts of the Stalinist journalist Claud Cockburn to tar wealthy capitalists and blue bloods as Hitler-lovers. Cockburn authored the "Cliveden Set" epithet and spread it around with the help, ironically enough, of Foreign Office anti-appeasers fighting to gain a hearing with the appeasement-minded Tory prime minister, Neville Chamberlain. Nancy Astor and the influential policymaker Lord Philip Lothian, her political (and Christian Science) soul mate, were for appeasement all the way. As Fox shows, this no more meant they were fascists than it meant Chamberlain was one. Chamberlain reflected the longstanding opinion of most of the British public; no cabal was needed to put over his foolish policy of seeking "peace in our time" by handing territory to the insatiable Third Reich.

Lothian redeemed himself later by admitting his purblindness and, as ambassador to the United States, helping to persuade President Roosevelt and the American congress to support Britain's war effort with Lend Lease. It is not clear that Lady Astor ever recovered the esteem of the British (or American) public for so stubbornly resisting military and moral realities. Plymouth, though, was a different story; there her popularity never suffered. During the war she became a heroine. The Nazis rained bombs on Plymouth, and after the air raids she would walk the constituency, climb up on piles of rubble, and enjoin the townspeople not to give in to their fright or despair. She was tireless in relief work. When the attacks were at their worst she performed cartwheels, at the age of sixty-two, down in the bomb shelters to create a diversion.

She got the chance to enact the romantic notion she had long had of herself, in Plymouth, "as the Pilgrim returning to the place from which Drake had set off to reach Virginia."

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The will & the way

Susan Sontag In America: A Novel.
Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 387 pages, $26

reviewed by Carl Rollyson

In America begins with an epigraph from Langston Hughes: "America will be!" It is a fitting start to the story of a group of Poles who travel to Anaheim, California in 1876 to establish a utopian community. Their leader is Maryna Zaleska, Poland's greatest actress, who has forsaken her career in order to establish a farming commune. She is aware of the likelihood of failure, but the romance of starting anew, the challenge of succeeding where communities such as Brook Farm failed, is too enticing not to pursue. She takes with her a devoted husband, Bogdan; a young son, Piotr; and a young writer, Ryszard, who aspires to win her love.

In a note on the copyright page, Sontag explains that her novel was inspired by the career of Helena Modrzejewska, Poland's renowned actress, who did indeed emigrate to America in 1876 and settle in Anaheim with her husband Count Karol Chapowski; Rudolf, their fifteen-year-old son; Henryk Sienkiewicz, the future Nobel-Prize-winning writer; and a group of friends. Sontag insists on the word "inspired," since she does not follow the historical record too closely. She has allowed herself, she emphasizes, the freedom to invent.

Thus the journey to the new world and the making of a new community are yoked to Sontag's effort to create a new story out of the material of history. I insist on the word "effort" because in the novel's preface, "Zero," Sontag explores her personal relationship to her characters. She fancies herself a Nathaniel Hawthorne in the Custom House telling his readers how he acquired the scarlet letter.

Sontag once said to Pete Hamill that she would not be able to write a detective novel unless she could first invent the writer writing the story. "Zero" tells us who the writer of *In America* is. Sontag rehearses a good deal from the interviews she has given over the past thirty years: she grew up in Arizona and California wanting to be, like Marie Curie, a great scientist and humanitarian; her grandparents came from Poland; at eighteen she read *Middlemarch* and "burst into tears because I realized not only that *I* was Dorothea but that, a few months earlier, I had married Mr. Casaubon" (i.e., Philip Rieff). She has been to Sarajevo (the novel is dedicated to "my friends in Sarajevo"), and thinks of the Poles she overhears talking in a room (she has been magically transported to the past) as precursors of her beloved Bosnians—like the Poles, suffering occupation and partition.

The Sontag narrator of "Zero" appears only once in the novel—and then very briefly. What, then, is the point of "Zero"? It portends some grand link between past and present, author and material that the novel itself never delivers. "Zero" is important only because it is written in Susan Sontag's own voice, and Susan Sontag must be noticed as the writer. In her interviews (conveniently collected in *Conversations with Susan Sontag*), she is at pains to explain that she became a writer not to express herself, but to contribute to the body of great literature. To be recognized as a writer means more to her than what she writes. Style predominates over content—to apply the terms of her famous essay, "Against Interpretation," to herself.

Therein lies the problem. Sontag has never come to ground. She dreams of herself as a writer just as she dreams of an America that will be. The America that is has rarely appealed to her, and has usually merited her disapproval. In her essays, she has dismissed most of American fiction, and her comments on American history are about as superficial and ill-informed as those of any writer who has achieved her prominence.

It is very American to think of oneself as being in a constant state of becoming. But to soar one needs a firm launchpad, and Sontag has never been able to see herself or

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her native land in terms concrete enough to create palpable fiction. In the essay form, her abstract longing for becoming has a certain flair and speaks to a yearning that readers, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, find appealing. The very idea of a "new sensibility"—as she called it in her first book of essays, *Against Interpretation* (1966)—had a rousing sound to it. Having been there before, however, and with no startling new Sontag work to exemplify the new sensibility, "Zero" lands with a thud.

Reviews of Sontag's fiction often speak of a willed enterprise. She takes her cue from the Romanian philosopher E. M. Cioran, who advocates a spiritual strenuousness that requires us to "sever our roots" and become "metaphysically foreigners." Her essay on Cioran perfectly captures her own *willed* existence. In it, she embraces a thinker who counsels extrication from the world and from domestic commitments in order to experience life as "a series of situations" that leaves the consciousness free to explore its own labyrinth. What Sontag loves most about Cioran is his elevation of the "*will* and its capacity to transform the world."

Not surprisingly, then, *In America* evokes the "power of the will." While acknowledging her utopian tendencies and her doubts that she will prevail in America, Maryna declares, "I must and I will!" She is reminiscent of the earlier Sontag who weighed the risks of idealizing North Vietnam but then insisted the country deserved to be idealized! Maryna writes to a Polish friend that with a "strong enough will one can surmount any obstacle." America, Maryna concludes, is a "whole country of people who believe in the will."

In America fails because so much of it is declaiming without dramatizing. Even Sontag's fabled talent for epigram eludes her here: "passion is a beautiful thing, and so is understanding, the coming to understand something, which is a passion, which is a journey, too." Banal expressions make the novel a bore.

Only rarely does a character or a scene catch fire, as with Angus Barton, the theater impresario, who auditions Maryna when she decides to forsake her utopia for a career on the American stage. Henry James enters the narrative for a few pages, and Sontag does a nice parody of his style. But her effort to close the novel, as she did *The Volcano Lover*, with a dramatic monologue is inept, even though the speaker is Edwin Booth. We are invited to measure his anguished, if successful, career against Maryna's faith in the American promise of a new life, but the effort falls flat.

The biggest disappointment is Maryna herself. Sontag mentions in "Zero" how taken she is with divas. She even describes a scene she witnessed between Maria Callas and Rudolf Bing that occurred just as Sontag herself was beginning to establish a reputation in New York. But we learn little from Maryna or from the other characters about what it means to be a diva. Divahood, seemingly, would once have made an ideal subject for a Sontag essay, but she no longer seems willing to exercise the discipline demanded by the genre.

Sontag told a Polish interviewer in Warsaw last year that she had always wanted to write a novel about an actress. Sontag emphasized that she knew a lot about acting, having been in productions Mike Nichols staged at the University of Chicago. But her Maryna, rather like Sontag herself, takes refuge in the aesthetics of silence. Maryna does chatter on about her hopes for America, her attitude toward her husband, son, and lover, and about all manner of subjects—except the one that would engage readers. What does it feel like to be a diva? Her silence abut this matter, like Sontag's, seems almost perverse.

Although Sontag says she felt free to invent in her new novel, much of *In America* reads like a diligently researched report, replete with quaint passages about what America was like in nineteenth-century New York and the Western United States. Popular novelists like Caleb Carr have done a much better job with similar material, and it is hard to see why Sontag bothered.

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Without a driving plot, the historical background only makes a static novel more static.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, the introductory Custom House section succeeds because Hawthorne takes on the burden of the past, establishing his link to the seventeenth century even as he would like, in some ways, to shed its influence. The past was unquestionably an ineluctable part of the novelist and his novel. History was palpable, and it suffused both his style and content. Sontag writes like an exile who believes she can through sheer force of will conjure up the past. The reader soon tires of the novelist as eavesdropper, one who never commits herself to her characters, who in fact seems to feel superior to her creations, since, after all, they are only products of her will.

Shorter notice

Vassily Aksyonov The New Sweet Style. Random House, 482 pages, $29.95

In Vassily Aksyonov's 1980 novel *The Island of Crimea*, an upset woman named Tanya walks into a diner and orders shish kebab. A tremendously fat woman taunts Tanya and eats pie. A KGB agent enters. Things get clamorous. The chef, who is not wearing any pants, accosts a waif at the counter. The pie-eating woman snatches a man by the shirt, force-feeds him, and threatens him sexually. The KGB agent slips out the door and disappears into the night; the cashier doesn't even blink. Tanya knocks her plate to the floor and dashes outside. A group of German tourists locks arms, sways back and forth, and sings Nazi songs. A trio of elephants, ridden by "bottomless sex maniacs," charges through. Finally, someone yells "Cut!" Tanya had walked onto a movie set; the director liked her chance appearance and kept rolling.

In Aksyonov's latest novel, *The New Sweet Style*, no one yells "Cut!" Rather, the novel rockets imaginatively and seemingly without limit through the story of Alexander Korbach, a dissident Moscow theater director who is expelled from the USSR as an undesirable and emigrates to the United States. Though he has been told many times that his name is big in the States, Korbach's arrival is anticlimactic. Wandering around Times Square, "at one moment striding along like the Futurist poet Mayakovsky, at another shuffling along in the Beckett manner," drunk and on the verge of a psychotic break:

> There appeared to him a sight in the center of which, in huge, burning letters standing out against a dark sky, was his own name: ALEXANDER KORBACH. Well that's it. My time has come. They're calling.

"*Qu'est-ce que c'est, madame?*," he babbles at one of the passing "Nuevo Yorkers." "*Just 'Korbach,' sir! Un grand magasin!*," she answers.

> Sitting down on a stoop next to a bum and resting his head against a shaky skyscraper, he took a swig from the flask and looked at the evenly illuminated letters of his name. They did not blink, and they did not change colors like a Times Square chameleon. With a calm, yellow, electrical light, they confirmed it: "Alexander Korbach is a great name in the States!"

This discovery is only the beginning. He also finds the genealogy-obsessed fourth cousin billionaire owner of the Korbach department store, the astronaut/archaeologist daughter of said billionaire with whom he falls in love (the Beatrice of this book, the reason for the *dulce stil nuovo*), a job in a Los Angeles parking garage, and a small business as a drug dealer. Characters abound, as do plot lines. If Aksyonov weren't so genial, if he didn't write with such easy self-confidence, the thing would be a catastrophe.

Aksyonov frequently departs from the world of the plausible, or even the possible, but he does so with an enchanting nonchalance. Authors on flights of fancy often

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think they are up to more than caprice, and radiate a smug pomposity that is, at best, unbecoming. Not so with Aksyonov, for whom the funhouse is indeed fun. His intrusions (though they could number fewer) are friendly:

> Characters, characters, oh, these characters, we'll say in Mr. Gogol's style of "lyrical digression." Isn't it a bother to keep them in mind all the time, to make them interact, to display at least some logic in their actions . . . to drag them out from time to time, give them a good phonetic shower, a good healthy breakfast, a beer over lunch, champagne over dinner, to treat them well on the whole, as equals, or otherwise you might discover one day that they've run away.

Certainly he is playing around, but there's a big Russian history of gamesome authors. When Aksyonov has one character say to another, "That's right, my friend, the very building you took for the gates of Judgment Day at the beginning of the book," he isn't scribbling Roland Barthes on the blackboard; this is not a textual concern. He's having a good time of it.

A man steps into a wall and joins a virtual meeting going on there. Two business men get in a fight at a Lower East Side steak house; 59,438 bystanders die. Our hero, who is frequently described in terms wholly simian, runs off into a crowd and joins up in the popular resistance to the August Coup. Are we to believe that anyone would give our drunken monkey of a hero some astounding chest of Hollywood money so that he might make a movie about Dante and Beatrice? Well, no, but as Askyonov insists: it's a story. No one believes she lived in a shoe, either.

Still, tolerant as I am of Rabelaisian enthusiasm, Aksyonov makes some very odd missteps. He flubs screwy little details. A man dreams of driving on a beach, in a Jeep, away from it all, wind-blown and sun-bleached, wearing velvet jeans. No American man dreams of velvet jeans. A

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university parking lot is full of students setting their fancy coffee drinks on the roofs of their cars while they unlock the door with one hand, the other hand clutching a cellular phone. But it's the late Eighties, students didn't have cell phones, and coffee shops were not the defining ubiquitous element that they were soon to become. Nitpicky stuff, yes, and in a sense it is understandable that an émigré author would mess up some small details. That he's been playing with this book for well over fifteen years (sketches of it appeared in his published journal of arrival in the States titled *In Search of Melancholy Baby*) explains, but does nothing to excuse, the slips.

There are autobiographical elements to *The New Sweet Style*, but they are easy to spot. Aksyonov found here no billionaire fourth cousin, but rather a professorship at George Mason University and a stint at the Keenan Institute. There are limits to autobiography that don't suit Aksyonov's abundant absurdism. Cluttered with memoir and faux memoir as my bookshelves are, it gives me great relief to find an author who makes things up. Flipping through book after book of domestic squabble, family struggle, and flat-out whining leads me to approve of unrealistic fiction. Fiction that is invention, such as Aksyonov's, is like a cool drink of water. At times the draught goes on too long, but as I said, no one yells "Cut!" in this exuberant outpouring, and it was never for restraint that we turned to Russia.

—Max Watman

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Notebook

Life in Basqueland

by Alexander Coleman

The dour city of Bilbao, located on the Basque coast of Northeastern Spain on the Bay of Biscay, has not exactly been an attraction for tourists to the peninsula over the years—nothing, that is, compared to the varied allure represented by Seville and Granada, or even Madrid and Barcelona. Something still remains of Bilbao's rustbelt past; it is a city of some 400,000, renowned throughout Spain as a center for banking, steel mills, shipping, and shipyards. As a cultural force, it has always represented a liberal mercantile counterpoise to the rural, conservative tendencies of the Basque people.

The city survived three horrendous sieges by the reactionary Carlist forces in the nineteenth century, and it was almost razed to the ground by General Francisco Franco, who viewed the short-lived Basque autonomous government in Bilbao (permitted by the republic) as a mortal threat to his future domination of the nation, as it surely was. In *The Basque History of the World*,[1] Mark Kurlansky's overview of the Basque people, the city was spared this time, because Franco's German advisors instead decided to pounce on the spiritual home of the Basque people, a town called Guernica, with a notorious massacre later made palpable to all by the hand of Pablo Picasso.

Bilbao is indirectly involved in a topic taken up by Kurlansky late in his book—the whys and wherefores of the construction of the new Guggenheim Museum designed by Frank Gehry. In this disenchanted scrutiny of the matter, Kurlansky notes that the town of San Sebastián, the cultural, if not the political, center of the Basques, was summarily dismissed as a prospective site for the museum. The unlikely winner, Bilbao, was chosen partly because it was the headquarters of the Basque Nationalist Party (known as the PNV), founded on July 31, 1895 (Ignatius de Loyola's saint's day) by the fiery racist ideologue Sabino Arana. The party and its minions in the Basque autonomous government, which governs the area within Spain, paid the $100 million tab for the construction of the museum, not to mention an additional fee paid to the New York museum "for using the Guggenheim name on the building." The greatest anomaly is that Basque art was and is to be the last of the new Museum's concerns; rather, "nation-building" and political outreach were the prime motives behind this utterly fantastic venture. Most important of all, the world-wide publicity accompanying the opening would make use of the denomination "Basque" without the usual accompanying "terrorist," and *that* was the heart of the matter, full stop.

As the head of the PNV gloated to reporters,

> It was expensive, but it was cheap for what we

1 *The Basque History of the World*, by Mark Kurlansky, Walker & Company, 387 pages, $25.

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> got. . . . It is a great thing for the future. More than we ever thought, it is an important building. Everyone recognizes that it is a great building, greater than what is in it.

As an avid aficionado of the fortunes of the Basque people and a researcher into their history in the Pyrenees over the past two or three thousand years, Kurlansky's study implicitly asks broader questions about the Basques, Spain, and the European Union. Thus a reader might ask: Does it make any sense now to try to make a nation out of what he calls "Basqueland" comprising four Spanish provinces and three French, all of 8,318 square miles, "slightly smaller than New Hampshire"? Moreover, is it valid to still work away at such a Basque utopia when Europe is moving in the opposite direction, that is, toward unification and the dissolving of frontiers? Isn't there some dreadful lesson to be learned about the drive toward "ethnic purity" from the fate of the remains of Yugoslavia? Don't these mindless massacres and wholly tragic migrations of what were former neighbors tell us far too much about how little justification there is for such activity, all while still keeping in mind the power of supposedly "ancestral" rights or how grievous the apparent victimization of a people in the distant or recent past? As is well known, the Basque people are divided by a national frontier. Paris and Madrid have very fixed ideas about national unity, and the carving out of another nation from within these two geographical entities is not easily envisioned—except, that is, by a determined minority of very, very violent Basques.

The evidence of historians from Strabo and Plutarch on down reminds us that the Basques were a fiercely independent people speaking a strange language utterly unrelated to high or low Latin, or any of its local corruptions and variants amongst the Romance family. Successive invaders into the Pyrenees—Celts, Romans, Arabs, Visigoths—all quickly learned some brisk lessons about Basque ferocity and bravery. The Basques also gained the admiration of observers for their mode of self-government, their innate democratic leanings *avant la lettre*, and, in the Christian era, their sturdy piety and allegiance to the church.

The Basque people were a fundamental part of the triumph of the Spanish Empire in the old and new worlds, whether as soldiers, sailors, whalers, cod fishermen, shepherds, bankers, or iron forgers (Shakespeare's word for a fine sword is a "bilbo," from Bilbao, then a smithy center). They were indispensable to Columbus in his various exploits. Not to be overlooked is the fact that, in the days of heavily guarded frontiers, the Basque art of smuggling anything and everything made for a rich underground economy in the mountains. Basque names are all over Spanish America today, for they were avid colonialists. With the collapse of the Spanish empire in 1898, the particular linguistic groupings within peninsular Spain—Galician (Gallego), Catalonian (Catalan), Basque (Euskera/Vasco), among many others—asserted their identity against what they correctly sensed as an enfeebled central power in Madrid. The movement toward autonomy, now formalized in today's Spain, began in earnest—a centrifugal process observed by José Ortega y Gasset in his *Invertebrate Spain* (1921).

But the Galicians and the Catalans are offshoots from Latin culture; they are newcomers on the peninsular block. The special uniqueness of the Basques is much heralded by Kurlansky, and he proffers a wealth of data to show that the Basque people, their genetic profile, and their language are indeed very special cases within the whole context of the historical development of Western Europe, and that they are not candidates for bland assimilation in the "hands across the borders" manner. Consider their language: Kurlansky mentions the fact that it is an agglutinative language, similar to Finnish and Hungarian, but he doesn't seem to be aware of the most recent determinations, namely, that Basque is a vestige of the language of the Aquitanian people,

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the last pre-Indo European language group to survive in the area extending from the Pyrenees to the Garonne and on down to present-day Navarre. These people were extant during the first millennium BC, that is, before Celtic or Latin linguistic interference. Aquitanian inscriptions and tombs in Latin letters from after the Roman invasions, and the common ancestry of ordinary nouns in Aquitanian and present-day Basque seem to bear this genealogy out.

Blood analyses tell much as well: 50 percent of the Basques have type "O" blood, the highest in the world; 27 percent have "O" Rh-negative, the highest in Europe. The inference is that the Basques, because of genetic isolation in their mountain fastness, descend right down from Cro-Magnon man, "there being no evidence for any change in population in the area for thousands of years before the arrival of the Celts and later the Romans in the first millennium BC."[2]

Kurlansky also describes a distinctive physical characteristic of the Basque people, something that most Spaniards outside of the Basque territories readily affirm. The version here given is that "there is a Basque type with a long straight nose, thick eyebrows, strong chin, and long earlobes," topped, it would seem, by the inevitable beret. This writer finds confirmation of this description in any photograph of the composer Maurice Ravel, born in Ciboure in French "Basqueland" just over the border—his is a classic Basque countenance.

Kurlansky has so much on his plate that some of the heavier ideological considerations determining the present political situation in the area get relatively short shrift. But speaking of plates, mention should be made of the splendid gastronomical aspect of this study. A good number of Basque specialities, available only in the region or in specifically Basque restaurants in major Spanish cities, have been here laid out within the fabric of Kurlansky's narrative. Notably and seemingly succulent as "virtual" dishes on the page are the "Espellete peppers and duck hearts," the "Pimientos de Guernica," the "Beans of Tolosa with cabbage and blood sausage garnish," and, most particularly, the "Hare with walnut and chocolate," a distant descendant of the chocolate *móle* brought back from Mexico by soldiers captained by Hernán Cortés. The pleasures of the table have a high place in Basque culture. It is gratifying and amusing to know that the mayor of San Sebastián in the province of Guipúzcoa is expected to eat at least once a year in each of the city's *seventy-five* gastronomical societies.

In darker tones, Kurlansky brings some insight into the motivation of the most violent of the Basque terrorist groups now active: the ETA. But Kurlansky is a valiant defender of the Basque cause, and his bias becomes too evident—he is an apologist for the autonomous ambitions of a certain sector of the Basque people, who are by no means a majority. Kurlansky could have said a lot more in a negative way and gone a lot deeper.

The recently published studies by Jon Juaristi, a Basque professor and formerly a jailed militant, demonstrate how, in an apparently "democratic" era where the secularization of the state is complete and where the Basques have achieved an almost complete autonomy in the federalist sense, violence—particularly a kind of sacratized violence—is still maintained by a fanatic minority as if it were a religion to live by. And this is a phenomenon deeply opposed by the Basque majority, who have been marching in the streets in the tens of thousands over the years to stop the madness.

Juaristi's criticisms, besides their savagery, also carry with them a high degree of humor. Recently, referring to a wholly autonomous Basque state sometime in the far future, he predicted that

> we'll become a theme park for the "live and direct" study of the roots of European Neolithic civilization. . . . I'll spend my time

2 See Larry Trask's essential website on the Basques: www.cogs.susx.ac.uk.users.larryt.basque.html.

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> filling out questionnaires handed out by language inspectors . . . there will be cocktails at the Guggenheim.

These barbs have earned him the unenviable status of a near-persona non grata in the Basque country.

Indeed, one of the final ironies that Kurlansky couldn't possibly have been aware of is the fact that the Basque Nationalist Party head he quotes in his book, Xabier Arzalluz—the man who so fatuously boasted about the funding of the Guggenheim in Bilbao in all of its glory—is the same Arzalluz who, piqued after reading Juaristi's stinging critiques of Basque "autonomous" fantasies for the next millennium—descended to the level of repeatedly suggesting to Juaristi that "if he were not happy here, neighboring Castile is a broad and welcoming land." Such sinister suggestions of voluntary exile for a dissident in matters of cultural policy clearly signal the end of critical thinking in Basqueland, however constituted. And this would be so even if both sides of the Basque people were to retain their present status in Spain and France respectively, but with increasingly "indigenous" and "puristic" language pressures applied to all recalcitrants, in the manner now well ensconced in Québec.

Still, the PNV is an establishmentarian party, not really violent. The ETA, however, works through its own cliques and compartmentalized cells. Sensing pressures from the populace occasioned by the peace process in Northern Ireland, the ETA declared a "total, unilateral, indefinite, and unconditional truce" on September 16, 1998. After fruitless negotiations with Madrid, the hardliners in the ETA won out over the political wing, and the truce was broken on December 3, 1999, after fourteen months of relative civic peace. Just this past Christmas season, two truck bombs were intercepted by the civil guard on their way to Madrid, one containing 950 kilos of explosives, the other 750 kilos, three times more powerful than any of the previous twenty-six car or truck bombs endured by Madrid over the past decades. Both bombs were timed to go off at 7:56 P.M., just when offices were closing and the streets would be most congested. The minister of the interior called it a "Death Caravan." Mr. Arzalluz, infallible in his foolishness, congratulated the minister and his forces for having found the bombs, but alleged at the same time that "he would have been delighted if [they] had exploded," since it would have permitted more repression from Madrid against the Basque people.

At the end of this intriguing study of the fortunes of the Basque people over the past few thousand years, Kurlansky quotes an old and ultimately attractive Basque saying —"Let us be what we are." This is a crystalline formulation that contrasts mightily with the impossibility of the total "autonomous" realization of a Basque homeland in the larger contexts of the political structures of both Spain and France.

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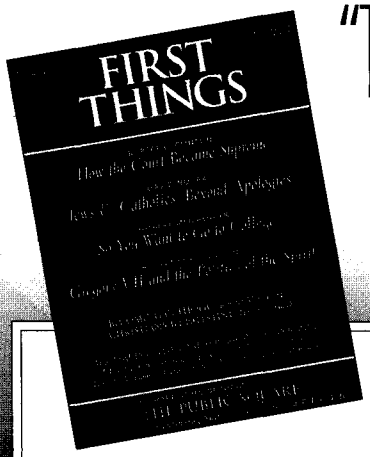

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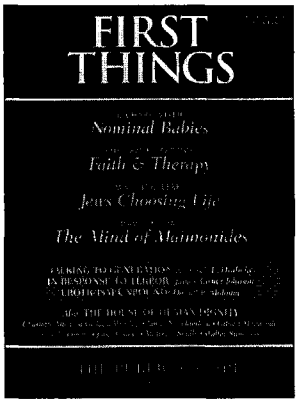

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March 18 – April 22

Charles Cowles Gallery

INTERIM LOCATION

74 Grand Street Soho New York 10013

Tel (212) 925-3500 Fax (212) 925-3501

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Howard Ben Tré

April 7 – June 11

Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art

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